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THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.



THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.

BY

GEORGE FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF "A NILE NOVEL" AND "MIRAGE."

. . . doch fall ich unbesiegt, und meine Waffen
Sind nicht gebrochen; nur mein' Herze brach!

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1880.

CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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I DEDICATE this book to my dear mother; begging
her to accept it from me as one more proof—where
surely no proof is needed—of my deep love for
her, my admiration, and my profound respect.

GEORGE FLEMING.

QUEEN ANNE'S MANSIONS,
Aug., 1880.



THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.

THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.

Book I.

A GIRL'S CHOICE.

“ It is the action of the will that causes the unconscious habit ; it is the continual effort of the beginning that creates the hoarded energy of the end.”

W. BAGEHOT—*Physics and Politics.*

“ It is ideals that inspire conduct though from afar.”

MORLEY—*On Compromise.*

PRELUDE.

THE spring began early last year in Rome. Towards five o'clock one sunny afternoon in March, a stream of foot passengers was moving steadily up the two broad walks which lead to the Pincian Hill, while the long glittering line of carriages defiling slowly before the music made it difficult to cross the road.

The younger Italians were gathered for the most part in two closely-serried ranks in front of the band. Behind them was

that open space commonly called the Piazzale. It was here that many carriages paused for a little, giving much opportunity for comment, anecdote, and recognition to the critical Roman crowd.

At the extreme end of this enclosure, a man of about five-and-forty, dressed in a rough gray shooting-coat, stood leaning against a tree and smoking. His face and general appearance marked him out at once as an Englishman. The absence of all acquaintance on his part with any of the occupants of the various carriages showed him to be a stranger. He had been one of the first to arrive that afternoon. He stood facing toward the Trinita de Monti, looking down the road. He could see each carriage a long dis-

tance off; he watched each new arrival with the same quiet intentness of observation. Once or twice when a closed landau passed him he even moved forward sufficiently to look into its windows as it drove by, but his curiosity had thus far been rewarded only by the sight of some portly dowager wrapped in furs, or, as in one instance, by meeting the oblique, impassible glance of a priest.

This persistency had ended by attracting the attention of the man who stood nearest to him, whose first look of inquiry had rapidly deepened into a continuous stare. For a few moments he seemed to hesitate, but presently turning, he asked his neighbour for a light. The Englishman took a box of matches from his pocket and handed

them to him without speaking. His neighbour lighted his cigar deliberately, and then raising his hat :

“I thank you, Signor Lesseterre,” he said.

Lexeter looked up abruptly. Was there not something familiar to him in these brilliant black eyes *à fleur de tête*, the yellow skin and heavy coarse moustache of his interlocutor ?

As his mind went confusedly back, seeking to classify this face among old memories, the gentleman smiled again.

“You do not remember me? It is many years ago, but I have an excellent memory—*una memoria stupenda*. I am Cavaliere Borgia—Marcantonio Borgia, at your service.”

He went on smiling, and extended a thick yellowish hand. Lexeter took it without any corresponding enthusiasm.

“I have met you very often at Lalli’s—in the country—nine years ago. You remember Madame Lalli? Ah, Cesco is my very good friend. A friendship of youth, one does not lose that. A friend of youth, that is precious, that does not easily replace itself, eh, Signor Lesse-terre?”

“Undoubtedly,” said Lexeter, looking at his stick.

“You have not forgotten your Italian? That is good—that is wonderful—*stupendo*. You have never been back again since then?”

“Never.”

“*Già, già.* Of course. But one always returns to Rome.”

He took off his hat to a passing carriage. The lady within bent her head vaguely, in answer to his salutation. She was young; she was pale; she looked chilled. Her listless glance wandered heavily and blankly across the crowd. Many other men took off their hats to her.

“The Duchess of ——. A charming woman—*simpatica, stupenda.*” The cavalier ran his yellow fingers through his hair. “You do not know her? No? Not even by sight?” He himself had been presented to her the day before, at the end of an Embassy ball, where he had spent the night in a corner, speaking to no one and completely unknown.

He began now to give some details of her private history, until, growing conscious that Lexeter was according him the smallest possible amount of attention, he stopped short in the midst of a sentence, shrugged his heavy shoulders :

“ *Già !* these are follies—follies. But what is life without them, Signor Lesse-terre? Life in Italy? Ah you English ! As I said to my friend Cesco when he took an English wife——”

Lexeter did not move, but his face darkened.

“Madame Lalli is American,” he said shortly.

“American—English ; it is all the same. A cat is a cat even when he is gray. Principles, they have principles enough,

che diavolo! Now a woman like the little duchess——*Basta!*”

He took out his handkerchief and shook it. A strong smell of patchouli filled the air.

“You have not seen the Lallis?—my friend Cesco and his wife?” he asked abruptly.

This time Lexeter looked at him.

“I have not seen them.”

“Ah! You are here, perhaps, only for a little while?”

“For a day merely.”

The music—they were playing a Strauss waltz—ended with a clash of instruments. All at once the confused murmur of voices became more audible. There was a thinning of the crowd. Many carriages moved

away. The sun, which had been under a cloud, just above the dome of St. Peter's, shone out again, gilding the rapid wheels and turning the fine dust into a soft powdery golden haze. Some children were chasing each other about among the roses. A great many women passed by slowly, dragging their dresses in the dust, laughing and talking beneath their large white parasols.

"Is—do you happen to know if either of the Lallis is in town?" asked Lexeter abruptly.

"*Che diavolo!* but you have not seen them then," his companion answered, with the air of propounding an entirely new idea. "Yes, they are both here for a day or two. Only a day. They live

near Albano now, farther up in the mountains. Madame Lalli has a place there. They call it—wait a moment—*Che diavolo!* am I losing my memory? She is benevolent; she teaches children the alphabet; how to knit stockings.” He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. “Cesco is here constantly. Apparently he does not care for life at Villa—Villa—? Wait, I have it.”

Lexeter knew the name perfectly. He had returned that very morning from Albano. He had been shown all over the villa in question by the servant left in charge. He had even visited the school. But he did not choose to say so. He even hesitated fastidiously at receiving information from this man. He

would not ask for Lalli's town address, although he derived a distinct sensation of disgust from reflecting that this man undoubtedly knew it. All information grew distasteful coming from this channel.

“And your friend, the young man who was always with you, signor—il Signor Hardinge?” Borgia went on, with a certain maliciousness of emphasis, “is he too come back to Rome to meet my good friend Cesco?”

Lexeter glanced sharply at him, and made no answer. A moment later there was a movement about the music-stand; the musicians took up their instruments.

“Good-morning,” said Lexeter suddenly, touching his hat with two fingers.

He moved away across the road as the

first notes of the overture to "Tannhäuser" stole tremulously out. There was something peculiar about his way of walking. He was slightly lame. Borgia had forgotten this circumstance. He remarked it now, and it gave him a certain feeling of satisfaction. Our neighbours' personal defects are often apt to strike us in the light of compliments.

Lexeter turned to the left. He passed through some scattered shrubbery into a broad path, screened from the road on one hand by a row of wide-spreading larches. The low parapet on the other side is the Pincian boundary wall. A hundred feet below in the shadow the tangled tree-tops of the Borghese Villa looked like a delicate cloud of dun-

coloured smoke. Here and there a stone pine made a dark round spot. The sky was cloudless and limpid—a vast pale expanse of blue suffused with golden light. Away to the west the cypresses of Monte Mario made a distinct silhouette against that clearness. The sun was still shining on the white walls of the villa.

Lexeter thought himself alone. The crowd had streamed back to the music. He was not an even-tempered man. He leaned over the parapet and looked down.

“Confound the fellow!” he said savagely. He struck the open palm of his hand against the stone.

But almost at the same moment he

was conscious of the presence of another person—a woman dressed in black, seated on a bench at a little distance from him, and talking to a child. Her back was towards him and he could not see her features. When he first caught sight of her, her head was bent down; she was looking at something she was holding. The child pressed forward eagerly to see it too.

“Be careful, Guido,” the lady said with a laugh.

At the first sound of her voice Lexeter turned hastily. His face changed. He started to his feet and there stood still, irresolute.

“Ah, I was afraid so. It is dead. You have killed it. Poor butterfly! Take it

away, dear. Go and bury it over there among the trees," she went on gently, in her full, even, caressing tones.

She rose as she spoke; she drew the black lace closer together about her throat, and walked slowly over to the parapet, a few yards away from Lexeter. He could see her face now. That face was paler—it seemed to him the line of the cheek was fuller than when he had last seen it. She had not noticed his presence. She stood with one gloved hand resting on the stone, looking vaguely off at the horizon.

Lexeter cast one rapid glance in her direction, he half turned his back upon her, he did not wish to be recognised yet. At that moment his strongest impression

was one of unreality. For years past, in certain moods, the thought of this possible meeting had had the power of moving him with indescribable tenderness and expectation. But after the fashion of things which have been long and ardently preimagined, it seemed to have lost the definite outline of reality. A few paces farther down, where the walk ended, a marble statue was shining in the last level rays of the sun. The circular strip of grass about its feet was all powdered over with small pink and white daisies. Lexeter fixed his eyes upon these stupidly, and waited—he did not know for what. It seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that he should be standing so.

The afternoon was very still. There

was no wind. It was too far off to hear the music; only the more strident notes reached them at irregular intervals, detached, and without modulation. Presently there were footsteps, the quick pattering footsteps of a child crunching upon the gravel of the walk. The sound faltered and ceased in front of Lexeter. He looked up. A little boy was watching him curiously.

“What is the matter with you? What makes you stand like that? Why don’t you walk about?” he demanded boldly, fixing his great dark eyes upon the stranger’s face. “Perhaps you are ill and you *can’t* walk,” he suggested gravely; “shall I go and tell mamma?” Lexeter smiled down at him.

“So you are little Guido Cardella?” he said, and held out his hand. The child came forward without the slightest hesitation and put his little warm fingers into it.

“Are you one of the people who knew me when I was a baby?” he asked confidently, with the air of referring to some well-known period of history. “Are you the gentleman who gave old Prince to my mamma? And did you have him when he was quite a puppy? Tell me all about him when he was a puppy.”

“Guido,” said Lexeter abruptly, “go and say to—your mother,” he hesitated over the word, “that an old friend of hers is here and would like to speak to her.”

The child ran off with the promptness of a habit of loving obedience. Lexeter followed slowly after him. His heart was beating perceptibly. "At my age!" he said to himself with a sort of stupefied irony. But the irony was only lip deep—the tribute we all render mechanically to the fetish of habit. Never in all his experience, never at any time of his youth, had he been possessed by deeper emotion than at the sound of those first low words of greeting from Barbara.

She had changed very much in these nine years. It was almost the first thing he noticed distinctly about her. He had been right in thinking her cheeks had grown fuller; but there were new lines about the mouth, the contour of the

chin was more defined, the whole face had undergone an indescribable change. He told her so after a moment.

“Yes,” she said simply. “It is all such a long long while ago.” She looked at him, and her beautifully-cut lips suddenly parted in a smile—that well-remembered smile! “It is so like you to tell me I have grown an old woman.”

Lexeter smiled too. He took off his hat and passed his hand over his forehead. He was all at once conscious of a singular feeling of satisfaction—of happiness even. He drew a long breath, and leaned back against the parapet.

“I have been watching for you all the afternoon, over there,” he said, indicating the Piazzale with a motion of his eyes.

“You have been here and I did not know of it?” she repeated regretfully, with something of the same full sweetness of intonation she had used in speaking to Guido. “If I had only known it! But I seldom go near the music. Crowds—I think they frighten me. I dislike crowds, you remember.”

“I remember,” he said gravely.

“And more than ever now. I come here so seldom. We live almost entirely in the country now, beyond Albano.”

He thought again of the lonely villa he had seen there.

“And we are going back to-night,” she added suddenly. “I wish I had known. Oh, why did you not come here sooner? I shall hardly have seen any-

thing of you at all; and I had so much to ask you," she said, in a child-like tone of disappointment.

Lexeter turned his brown eyes slowly towards her, and did not answer. He was thinking of the days he had wasted searching for her home.

"I—I wish I *could* ask you to come and see me," she added, speaking very low.

Lexeter moved uneasily.

"How is Count Lalli?" he asked abruptly, after a silence.

"Very well."

"Is he——?"

He thrust the end of his stick under a loose pebble, and buried it deep in the soft earth of the walk. "I saw—I have

been talking with an old friend of yours," he said. The word "friend" slipped out quite unintentionally. He was speaking at random.

"Yes?"

Barbara rested one gloved hand upon the other and looked at him.

"Oh, I only meant that man Borgia—Cavaliere Borgia," said Lexeter hastily, with a forced laugh.

Her heart seemed to stop beating for an instant, and then contracted painfully.

"Oh, I know him so slightly," she said. Her lips trembled. At that moment Lexeter fairly hated himself.

"I am so sorry not to see more of you," she went on rapidly after a moment's pause. "You must have so much to tell

me about yourself all these years; and I should like to show you my schools. You did not know that I had a charity school now? We have two—one on each of Count Lalli's places; and Guido helps me," she said, looking down and resting her hand on the boy's shoulder. He pressed nearer to her, and rubbed his cheek slowly against the fur on her sleeve.

"We were to have had a small fever hospital—some of the harvesters suffer terribly, and Rome is so far to go. But that would have cost—— I mean—there are so many claims. One cannot always do what one thinks would be for the best without hurting other people—people one must not hurt. It is quite

terrible sometimes to think how one may, so easily, be adding to the pain in the world."

She spoke in a hurried way, with a sort of sob in her voice. It seemed as if some new experience were giving vividness to the images in her mind.

"And that—that is the way you spend your life," said Lexeter bitterly.

"Mr. Lexeter——"

Their eyes met for a moment, and rested there with a grave and mournful avowal. It seemed to them both that so much had been asked and answered in that brief interval.

Presently she turned her head and looked away past him to the faint sunny outline of Soracte. Gradually the agitated

look passed from her face; her large full-lidded eyes fixed themselves upon the distant line of mountains with an expression in them as of an habitual and accepted want.

“Barbara!”

The sun was setting now. Even here, among the trees, the spaces were filled with a reflected light. The musicians were playing the last notes of the last waltz. The wind which had risen with the sunset brought these in fuller cadence. It brought with it as well the perfume of the violets which Barbara wore on her breast. She was standing close beside him. Again he was conscious of that overpowering sense of expectation. His heart began beating thickly. Involuntarily

he half put out his hand and drew it back.

“Barbara!”

She looked at him gently. Her eyes were moist with tears, but she smiled.

“There is always Guido,” she said under her breath. “*And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.*”

Lexeter stared at her hard for a moment. His hope sank suddenly—like a candle that has been blown out.

“Yes, you are right; you are always right,” he said.

The words held no meaning for him. His mind was filled with a certain vague feeling of contempt for himself. He suddenly felt that he had grown old. Just then Guido came up to him, taking firm

hold of his hand to swing himself back a little, looking up into his face.

“They thought old Prince was going to die last year,” he said earnestly, with the air of resuming an interrupted story, “and mamma cried. Should you have cried when you had him if he had been going to die when he was a puppy?”

Lexeter put out his other hand and silently smoothed the curly hair back from the boy's forehead.

“I think it was a gentleman called Mr. Hardinge who gave that dog to your mamma, my boy,” he said after a moment. He turned to Barbara. “Walter was in town last summer for a day or two. I saw him there. I dined with him at his

hotel. He has hardly changed at all. He looks—exactly the same.”

“Yes. I always imagined——”

She shivered slightly. A faint flush passed over her pale cheeks. She pressed the tips of her gloved fingers against her lips. Lexeter glanced at her sideways and looked down.

“Hardinge has been making a great name for himself — writing some papers on political economy. I can send them to you if you like. There is some chance now I think of his going into Congress. I hope he will, dear old boy. I always look upon Walter as upon some of the yeast which is to leaven the whole loaf. Walter was born successful.”

She moved slightly, but did not answer.

Her hands were clasped together. He did not see her face.

“He was in town only for a few days,” said Lexeter slowly. At that moment it seemed to him that he had come to Rome merely to say this. He made a distinct effort to put more life into his voice. He felt like an actor who was garbling his part. “He was there—alone. Mrs. Hardinge had stayed with the children in America.”

“How is Octave, do you know?”

“I think,” he said, “she was very well; just as usual.”

“And they still live at his place on the Hudson?”

“Yes.”

“And in the winter they go to Washington?”

"I believe so."

"I have not heard from Octave for years," said Barbara, still a little tremulously. "At first she used to write to me, but people drift apart. We are neither of us good correspondents. And people drift apart." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I am glad to have seen you. You are very good to me," she said.

"I? Not at all," said Lexeter, automatically. It gave him a certain feeling of impatience to hear himself thus spoken of. What was the use of it? Everything had been said.

She turned to go. "Come, Guido."

"Your carriage is waiting for you? Allow me to see you as far as your carriage," he said, with the same sensation

of reciting a prearranged part. They walked down the broad alley in silence. They turned to the left, following the division wall. The sun had set; this part of the promenade was entirely deserted. Already the radiance was gone from the sky. The trees of the Ludovisi Villa were all in shadow; the colour of the fields was growing uniform, with here and there a darker line of cypresses.

There were many marble busts—heads of poets, of senators, of soldiers—standing in pale relief among the shrubbery. Lexeter looked up at one of these as they passed. It was the head of Leopardi. “It was here that I met you one morning,” he said in a low voice. And each of them remembered that day.

When they came within sight of the carriage, which was waiting by the entrance-gate, Guido ran forward and climbed up joyously beside the coachman. "I shall drive. I want to drive all the way home," he said.

Barbara started at the sound of his voice. It was then she turned and gave both hands to her companion.

"I have been so glad—I want you to believe how glad I have been to see you," she said earnestly. "You do believe this?"

He looked at her fixedly, and a curious sort of smile passed over his pale face.

"Good-bye!"

"But you do believe it?" she persisted timidly.

Lexeter put her into the carriage and shut the door. He spread the fur rug carefully over her knees.

"Are you quite warm enough?" he asked.

"Quite warm, thank you."

He stood there irresolute a moment, still holding the handle of the door. But when had it been possible for him to resist that pleading tone in her voice?

"I *do* believe it," he said abruptly. "You were always a good girl, Barbara. You have a tender heart."

He stepped back and lifted his hat.

"I shall send you those reviews when I get home to England." The same dubious smile contracted his lips. "Drive on, coachman."

“Drive on!” repeated Guido joyously, clapping his hands.

Lexeter did not stand looking after the carriage. On the contrary, as soon as Barbara had driven off, he turned immediately about and began retracing his steps to the promenade. Under the ilexes in front of the French Academy, half-a-dozen ragged children, who were dabbling their fingers in the water of the fountain, ran up to him and begged for a sou. The eldest of them was a flower-girl, who followed him for some distance, offering the contents of her half-empty basket. At first Lexeter paid no attention to her. She was continuing her importunity mechanically and with no idea of a sale, when, just at the entrance-gate,

he turned suddenly, threw a piece of money into her basket, and without looking at her, took up a bunch of violets which he fastened in his coat.

“But I have no change, signore,” the girl said deprecatingly, closing her dirty fingers promptly over the note.

“Then you have no business to be selling things at all,” said Lexeter sharply. “Never mind that now. You may keep whatever you’ve got.”

He had intended crossing directly over the hill, but it was the hour at which everyone leaves the Pincian. The narrow side-walk was crowded with people on their way home to dinner, strangers and Italians, black-gowned priests in couples, loudly chattering files of lads in the

scarlet robes of the German College, and heavy nurses in Albanese costume, dragging small wailing infants by the hand.

Lexeter took the first short cut out of all this confusion. He walked on, not caring very much where he went. At one moment he stood still and struck his stick sharply down upon the ground. "So that is over," he said aloud. And then again he laughed and looked about him. But there was no one there to overhear the words ; he was quite alone. And again the sentiment of a deep lassitude possessed him. He thought only languidly of Barbara. His mind wandered away from her ; his attention drifting aimlessly about, catching upon such small details as

the position of a statue or the colour of green leaves against the sky. He was in that state of being in which apathy is consciously a mere preface to suffering; and Sorrow may have her voice, Despair his own exceeding bitter cry, but Misery is dumb. At that moment Lexeter was most miserable.

He walked on until he reached the spot where they had paused before the bust of Leopardi. There was still light enough in the sky to throw the white-hooded figure into pale relief. Lexeter stopped here. He stood still, looking at the marble face in the shadow with a curious feeling of comradeship. "And you, too, you experienced this," he thought. He glanced at the bench in front of him. He

remembered a morning, long ago, when here at this very spot he had met a young girl on her way to her first tryst with her lover. And certain old words came back to him :

O natura, o natura,
Perchè non rendi poi
Quel che prometti allor?

In the twilight the bitter immutable mouth of the dead poet seemed to smile with implacable negation from its forgotten corner among the clustering leaves of a new spring.

But when at last he wandered out from among these trees the changed look of the world was fairly enough to startle one. For behind St. Peter's, where the sun had set, the light was like a shining

silver flame. The horizon was the colour of the heart of a rose ; and away to the east, away across the waste of the Campagna, the purple shadows were slowly darkening on the hills.

He walked over to the farther esplanade and looked down. Already a pale thin mist was creeping over the houses. The city lay at his feet, gray and fawn-coloured, like some heap of huddled shells. Everything was in half-tints, and over against him rose the dim rounded darkness of the dome. The wind blew past him in soft pulsations like a breath—"airs from the Eden of youth." The serene silence of the limpid bending sky struck upon the senses like the vast primeval caress of a mother-world.

Lexeter took off his hat with a feeling of relief. There was no one left here but himself. He leaned against the balustrade ; he looked down at the creeping mists drawing nearer. The penetrating odour of the violets he wore in his coat reached him from time to time, burdened with all the clinging sadness of regretful memory.

And these are some of the things which he remembered.

CHAPTER I.

IT was at the charity ball at the Campidoglio that Barbara Floyd first met the man she was to marry. It was indeed a memorable evening to her, even in other ways than this. For one thing, it was her first official introduction into Anglo-Roman society—into any society. And it is quite possible that there may have been some slight trepidation underlying her usual self-possessed manner as she stood, ready dressed, before the dim old-fashioned swinging-mirror in her own room. She

contemplated the tall slender reflection dressed all in white quite gravely and even anxiously for a minute or two, and then an amused look began to steal into the clear candid eyes.

“I wonder if I shall do? If Octave will approve of me?” she said lightly.

At that moment there came a knock at the door.

“Come in,” the young girl answered, without turning her head. “And have you come to take a look at me, Margherita?” she went on, addressing the thick broad-chested reflection which joined hers in the glass. “And is the carriage waiting?”

“Miss Octave was not to call for you before ten o'clock,” the old woman

answered in Italian. “ And, indeed, it is a good sight to see you dressed for a ball like other young ladies, Miss Barbara. I was telling the buttermilk man about it only this morning, when I went in to see about the eggs for the signora’s breakfast. And come in at what hour you like, I said, it is always the same ; there sits my young lady at her books, and read—read—read ! And if it is a question of a walk, when was it ever : ‘ Margherita, we will go for a turn on the Corso ; ’ or, ‘ Margherita, the sun is shining, let us go and hear the music on the Pincio and see all the fine dresses ? ’ No ! What I hear is : ‘ Margherita ! to-day I shall walk to the gate,’ or ‘ to the galleries,’ or ‘ to the blessed Vatican,’ where the Holy Father

lives, and there is nothing to look at but the English foreigners counting up the statues to see if they are all put 'down in the little red books; and not a young man in the house from one Carnival to the next! Madonna mia! we thought of other things when I was a girl, I said. And the signore with his head in the air and always thinking of his pictures——”

“Come here and fasten in these flowers for me, you silly old woman,” said Barbara good-naturedly. “Now, look here, Margherita, I am going to give you a piece of advice. The next time you go in to buy your groceries, and the pizzicaruolo asks after me, or the pizzicaruolo's wife begins to gossip——”

“Ah Holy Virgin! but it will be a

long time before the poor woman has a word to say for herself again, the saints be with her! And have you not heard the news, Miss Barbara? But, indeed, how should you ever hear of anything! And it was last night that the pizzicaruolo came home from the drinking-shop where he had been having a glass with a friend or two, poor man! And they had been talking as men will; so when Giacomo came home and his wife was not there the drink began to go to his head, *poveretto!* and he took his knife and waited behind the door. And when she came in—perhaps he did not mean really to give her a cut, and perhaps the wine had made his hand heavy—and then, seeing the blood——”

The girl turned pale. She put out her

hand suddenly and caught at the frame of the mirror. "Is the woman dead?" she asked in a very low voice.

"*Dio ce ne guardi!*"

Margherita shrugged her handsome shoulders until the long gold earrings swung against her cheek. "They have taken her to the hospital of the Consolazione. And as for him, poor fellow! what would you have? It was all jealousy. Not a bit of malice in it—all pure jealousy. We are not like you others, Miss Barbara, when a passion takes us, we Italians! *Basta!* I have seen them of all colours when I was a girl in Genzano. There was my own brother, now. He was killed in a quarrel at fair-time. That was under the old government, and they took the man who stabbed him

and sent him to the galleys. Very well. And then my father bought himself a new knife and waited. Those were the good old days when prisoners were sure of their pardon—prisoners who never spoke against the Holy Virgin or the Government. And there is a proverb which says ‘Ten words are not worth one blow.’ And it is a very good proverb, that ; there are crosses all along the road to show what it means. I have heard my father say that many a time—good old man ; he was always so fond of his children. Well, as I was telling you, signorina, one day—perhaps it was a year later—one morning when my father was in his shop——”

But by this time the girl had begun to recover herself. The colour came back to her lips. Only there was a great sad-

ness still in her eyes as she spoke. "I will not hear the end of that story," she said, speaking very seriously ; "and, Margherita, to-morrow we shall go to the Consolazione, you and I. And you will see that there is something ready."

"Very well," the old woman said shortly. She had been kneeling down to make sure of the fastening of the white satin rosette on her young mistress's shoe ; but now she rose up, folding her arms across her ample bosom. "Very well," she said, in rather an offended manner ; "but it is glad I am to see you going out to enjoy yourself, Miss Barbara, with something better than my old stories. And glad enough I am that Miss Octave has come back. And will you have on your

cloak now, Miss Barbara, before you go to the studio? The signore is waiting to see you. He sent me to tell you so."

"Papa kept waiting all this time!"

She gathered the soft white folds of her dress in a heap around her, and went quickly out of the room. There was no light in the large low-ceilinged parlour, but the moon was shining in at the windows. She passed lightly and rapidly through that room and the next, and down a narrow passage, lit by a swinging lamp. At first there was no answer to her timid rap. She knocked again.

"Come in, Barbara," a voice answered. She opened the door and went in.

It was not a cold night, but Mr. Floyd

was standing with his hands behind his back, staring at the fire. He turned round and looked up at his daughter's entrance. They called this place the studio, but it was really nothing but a small and rather crowded room. The air was overheated and smelt of paint and of old leather. And indeed this was little matter for wonder, for the place was full of every kind of nondescript lumber. The walls were covered with tattered and dingy canvases. There were easels standing about with pictures on them in every stage of incompleteness. The table was littered with loose papers and old books, and long rows of leather-covered volumes stood ranged side by side upon the floor. There was a book open now upon the

mantelpiece among the dusty bottles, but Mr. Floyd had not been reading.

“So you are all ready for your ball?” he said slowly, looking a little curiously at this white apparition. And then, after a pause: “You are looking very well, Barbara.”

“Yes, papa,” the girl said shyly.

But somehow he did not look as if he had sent for her merely to compliment her about her dress.

“Yes, you are looking very well—very well,” he repeated slowly.

He was a small rather thick-set man, fully half a head shorter than his daughter. His face was clean-shaved; he wore neither beard nor moustache. His eyes were large, like hers, but of the lightest shade of blue;

and, as his face was also large and flat, and very much darkened and reddened by the sun, these keen pale eyes were the first thing you noticed about him. He turned round now, and suddenly and vigorously attacked the fire.

“If you are all ready to go, you have no jewels to wear,” he said.

His daughter looked at him with some astonishment.

“Any jewels, papa?” She was hardly sure of what he said, he was making so much noise with the fire-irons. “Why, I have none. I don’t want them ; I——”

The log of wood snapped suddenly across in the middle, and the ashes were scattered all over the hearth.

“Let me do that for you,” she said.

“Go away, Barbara. Take care ! you will only ruin your dress,” her father answered rather sharply.

He threw down the brush he was holding, went over to the table, and began to rummage among his papers.

“There ; you may have that ; take it away. It is yours, and everything in it,” he said without looking up. He pushed a small sandal-wood box towards her. The lock was evidently broken. It had been forced open at some time, and the cover was secured by a bit of black ribbon. He drew a chair up to the table, sat down, and opened a book. It was certainly a curious way of making a present.

But perhaps the manner in which she accepted it was more curious still. For

there was nothing in her face of the pleased surprise of a girl over a sudden windfall of new ornaments. Presently she drew nearer to the table. She rested both hands upon it.

“Papa,” she said.

He kept his head bent down.

“There, child, take it and go. I am busy. Can’t you see that I am busy?” he asked fretfully.

But the hand which was holding his book was not so steady as usual. He got up again and went and stood before the fire. “The diamonds in there are family jewels,” he said suddenly; “the Floyds have always had them. My mother wore them at her wedding; so did—— It—it has always been the custom in the family for years.

You will be careful of them, Barbara. As for the rest of the things——”

He glanced sideways at his daughter, and then looked down again at the fire, and fell to biting his nails. “You won’t find anything else there of much intrinsic value, I imagine,” he said with a short laugh.

She came up close beside him rather timidly and laid her arm across his bent shoulders without speaking. She stood so for nearly a minute, without his moving or giving any sign of being conscious of her presence. At last she said in her soft full voice :

“I am so sorry you should have pained yourself to give me these.”

She would have said more but that something seemed to rise up in her throat which

made her voice tremble, and warned her to be brief. Her father could not endure crying. He showed his usual dislike to scenes now by the manner in which he again requested her to leave him.

“I have some work—important work—to do,” he said a little impatiently. But when she bent down to kiss him he did not make any objection to it; on the contrary, he put up his hand and patted her cheek. It was burning hot.

“There, there; run along, child. Go to your ball and enjoy yourself. And, Barbara, you will not forget to give Mrs. Damon my compliments and best thanks for her kindness in taking charge of you. I shall do myself the honour of calling upon her to-morrow to thank her in person.”

But in spite of this new gentleness, when his daughter had gone, he lost no time in making fast his door. He turned the key in the lock with a sharp snap—Barbara could hear it, going down the passage—and went back to his old place before the fire.

He stood there a long while—a short middle-aged figure—still biting his fingernails angrily, and staring down at the glowing bed of coals which were slowly turning to white ashes. But what is this picture he is continually seeing there—the small bright country church full of the sunshine of some far-off summer morning, and all about him a crowd of familiar and friendly faces? And who is this girl who stands beside him, with a gleam of diamonds about her white

throat, and diamond stars in the marriage veil which covers her beautiful hair?

At that moment Barbara was looking at those very diamonds. She had gone back to the empty drawing-room; there was a lamp lighted there now. She placed her box upon the table and unfastened the knotted ribbon; the lid fell off its broken hinges with a jar. As her father had said, it was a motley collection of trinkets. The diamonds were in a case by themselves; she glanced at them rather carelessly and pushed them to one side. There was a quantity of loose coral beads rolling about, the thread which bound them had been snapped in two; the fine cameo bracelet she next took up had lost its clasp. The things seemed all to have been thrown in together hastily and left.

But quite at the bottom of the box, among the loose beads, she came upon something which suddenly made her heart beat faster and brought quick tears to her eyes. It was merely a thin old-fashioned locket with a glass face. On the back were engraved some initials and a date, and under the glass was a soft fair lock of hair—the hair of a very little child.

She touched it with the gentlest, the most indescribable emotion. Nothing else had ever given her this same feeling of nearness to the mother she had never known. A whole experience of loving companionship seemed revealed to her by the sight of this carefully cherished remembrance of her own babyhood. This was something her mother had done, with her own hands, in the ten-

derness of her love and pride. And in what far-off day had this small pale curl been treasured, and why ?

“ Oh mamma, mamma ! ” the girl said passionately, with trembling lips.

She swept everything else back into its place and stood looking at this which she held in her hand. She still kept the bit of black ribbon between her fingers. It fell against her white ball-dress like a visible sign of the sorrow which must always make a silent difference between her experience and that of others. But she was not thinking of this.

It was characteristic of Barbara that at this moment, with her mother's whole history brought freshly before her, all the power of her imagination should go out in an ideal-

ising attempt to realise the lost love of which here was the evident token. The more obvious personal and social consequences of that loss failed to impress her, except as they affected her father. And this was probably even more the result of temperament than of ignorance. She had spent too much of her young life in boarding-schools, where a high moral standard is one of the things specified in the prospectus, to make it probable that this indifference to lower calculations should be the result of education.

But now the door opened.

“Miss Octave is there. The carriage is waiting,” said Margherita, from the outside. She stood still, with her hands rolled up in her apron, watching her young mistress gathering together her cloak and handkerchief and

gloves. But when she saw the girl pass by her and go to the door without speaking, and still with that preoccupied look on her face: "And are you not going to give me something to carry down for you, Miss Barbara?" the old woman asked reproachfully.

She seized upon the lamp, and was especially careful of Barbara's dress in passing the door.

"*Audiamo!* Courage, Miss Barbara! It is not to confession you are going, but to a ball. I am a stupid old woman, with my stories. And you will not be leaving the key with the porter, for I shall sit up for you until you come home," she said penitently, halfway down the stair.

"Sit up for me? Nonsense! Go to bed

and to sleep as quickly as you can," the girl said, in a kindly absent sort of way. She was looking back and upwards, so that the light fell full upon her face and on her white dress, making a luminous spot against the dusky background of the dark old palacestair.

The carriage was waiting in the courtyard at the foot of these steps. There was someone standing in the moonlight, beside the open door, who took off his hat as she passed him.

"Well, Barbara dear—at last!" said Octave, bending forward with a soft rustle, and putting out a small tightly-gloved hand. And then a place was made for her beside Mrs. Damon, and Octave leaned forward again and held up a smooth cheek to be kissed.

“I am sure I am very sorry if we have kept you waiting, Barbara——”

“Nonsense, mamma! as if Barbara ever expected me to be punctual! Punctuality is a soldier's vice—do you hear, Count Lalli? And are you going to stand there all night with that door open? Do get in. I am freezing to death,” said Miss Damon, with an affected shiver of her pretty shoulders.

“A thousand pardons, mademoiselle!”

“I don't think you know my friend, Miss Floyd? Count Cesco Lalli, Barbara. As for mamma, she never thinks of introducing anybody. She would let the poor man sit there all the evening. Oh, he doesn't speak English,” said Octave carelessly. “You can say what you like. And speaking of liking,

what do you think of the way my hair is done?" She bent forward a little so that the light of the street lamp they were passing might shine upon her dark curly head. "Fillets, you know. The Greek sort of thing. So you think it is becoming?"

"Everything you do is becoming," said Barbara, looking affectionately at her.

Octave impressed her more than ever to-night like some delightful inexplicable inhabitant of another sphere—a sheltered world, in which there entered no questionings, no perplexity, no pressure on account of other people's mistakes, but where life meant chiefly the certitude of being charming, and the delight of being petted in consequence. There was not a year's difference in their age, but Barbara always thought of

herself as immeasurably the elder. She had that sympathetic and imaginative faculty of entering into other existences which makes the standard of actual years a merely conventional formula. This is not a faculty which belongs to happy lives. She was fond of Octave with that sort of tenderness which makes no demand upon companionship other than the mere comradeship of agreeable presence. Octave, on the other hand, was in the habit of saying "Barbara is so clever;" meaning by that chiefly that Barbara was addicted to reading books which had no story in them, would go of her own impulse to picture galleries or to listen to classical music, and actually enjoyed talking to friends of her father's, quite old men, who would go on speaking about

Cavour's policy, or the new project for draining the Campagna, without the slightest apparent recognition of her presence or presumable interests.

“I never can—I never shall imagine what it is you care about in those people,” Octave had said to her one day not long before. “Now that horrible Herr Müller with his spectacles, talking about the proportions of the human figure as calculated by the comparative tablet in the temple at Kom Ombos! What *is* the temple at Kom Ombos? And I don't think it is nice in a man of his age, who takes snuff, to be talking about the proportions of the human figure. It all comes from your going to those horrid statues at the Vatican, Barbara. I never could see that the Greeks had such particu-

larly good figures myself. And then that Monsieur Simon——”

“Well, what is the matter with poor Monsieur Simon’s figure?”

“Oh, he’s horrid!” said Octave comprehensively, arching her eyebrows.

“He was in Lyons in ’51. He was on the barricades.”

“Perhaps that is where he lost all his pocket-handkerchiefs?”

“Sometimes when he is here I look at him and try to imagine the things he has seen. Octave, I wish you would read ‘*Les Misérables*.’ Fancy,” said Barbara, letting her work fall on her knee and leaning forward with slowly brightening eyes, “fancy just the handful of men there against all the world, and fighting for what they know

could never come for them or even in their own time ; dying just to show that there are things in life worth dying for."

"Oh," said Octave coolly, "but you see it wasn't so bad as that. People always exaggerate. Look at Monsieur Simon ; *he* escaped. And I don't see that a man who talks through his nose is any less unpleasant because he is a hero, Barbara. After all, it is the daily habits that one cares about. If one must be doing things all the time, at least I should rather be doing them while I was young, like Cesco Lalli. He was in the Papal Zouaves, you know, until last year, and they gave him that medal for doing something or other—defending a bridge against a company of Garibaldi's troops with only ten men, while General Lamoricière got

away with his staff. He had his shoulder cut open with a sabre, and all his men were shot but two. But at any rate it was not so stupid as building barricades," said Octave calmly, getting up and strolling over to the looking-glass. "And at all events Lalli doesn't take snuff," she added, turning about and showing a rose-pink dimple in either cheek.

And Barbara laughed. It was the way in which their discussions commonly ended.

"I shall introduce Count Lalli to you. Only I'm afraid there is no chance for him, poor fellow! He is too handsome; you would never admire him," Octave had said with pretended melancholy.

All this had taken place some two or

three days before. To-night, in the carriage, Barbara seemed entirely to have forgotten her supposed curiosity.

She leaned back in her corner and was silent. Her eyes were fixed on the window, but the dark narrow streets through which they were rattling seemed alike unfamiliar. They passed the Roman Forum; at any other moment she would surely have roused herself to look at this, but now the still moon-whitened columns and archways affected her merely as a fantastic, meaningless background to the stress of intense personal feeling which was forcing itself upon her. She had fastened her mother's locket in her dress, and now she put up her fingers to feel for it.

“Why, Barbara, what are you thinking

of? You have not even put on your gloves," said Octave with dismay.

Barbara started. "I had quite forgotten," she said, a little confusedly.

And then Count Lalli spoke for the first time.

"Will you allow me?"

He had drawn off his own gloves, and held her wrist lightly between his fingers as he fastened the long gauntlets with the other hand. He secured the last button as they drew up before the palace gate.

"Thank you. Oh, that will do perfectly. Thanks," said Barbara, a trifle impatiently. And then in getting out of the carriage she had to give him her hand.

They went into the cloak-room together. "I hope I am all right, I'm sure. It is im-

possible to see anything of one's self in such a crowd," Mrs. Damon remarked plaintively, putting up her hand to her hair. It was not curly wavy hair like Octave's, but smooth and dark. They each had the same clear brown eyes, the same long throat, and there was a striking likeness in the carriage of the small round head; only in the mother's case there were some deep, and apparently quite irrelevant, lines about the temples, and her skin had lost that look of delicate rosy transparency which was one of Octave's greatest charms. Next to her daughter, Mrs. Damon looked not unlike a wax flower. "I'm so glad we brought a gentleman. I told you what a crowd there would be, Octave."

She put her hand on Count Lalli's arm.

"I hope the princess has not yet gone,

I'm sure. Keep as close to me as you can."

The two girls followed her into the ball-room.

"Ah, there is Mr. Hardinge talking to Clifford Dix. We are sure of partners as soon as they see us, Barbara. Not that one can even think of dancing in this crowd. But where is mamma going? Ah Mr. Dix, how are you? You are the very person I want. You know Miss Floyd, don't you? Barbara, let me introduce Mr. Dix. He can tell you who everybody is in the room. I am afraid of him myself. He writes novels," said Octave, showing all her dimples as she spoke.

"I call this cruel, Miss Damon."

"Oh, I prefer talking to Mr. Hardinge.

He adapts his conversation to my capacity," she said, moving away and turning her long throat to look at him over her shoulder. Barbara smiled involuntarily, watching her, Octave's prettiness being of that softly youthful type which is perpetually surprising one with the familiar and ever-fresh surprise of new flowers and returning springs.

CHAPTER II.

“YOUR friend seems to interest you,” Mr. Dix remarked after waiting a moment.

“Yes; you see she is my friend.”

“But that is precisely the thing which makes your interest surprising, don’t you see?” Mr. Dix continued in rather a languid tone.

He was not in the habit of manufacturing conversation for the benefit of every girl who was thrown in his way. He was a man consciously capable of extremely refined pleasures, which he afterwards described with curious nicety of epithet. His mind

was kept anxiously on the alert for the most appropriate emotions. His critics accused him sometimes of considering existence like a series of brilliant magazine articles, and contributing his own share with perhaps too vivid a realisation of clear-cut impression and epigram. But these were probably the same people who complained that he wrote like a man who examined the passions through an eyeglass. His books were impartially international. He was carefully cultivated; he had spent all his life in examining great things; and, in point of fact, he was certainly quite unerring in his accuracy as to those differentiating details of dress, card-leaving, and speech which are the final cause of American civilisation. He was invariably just in his

strictures. He had a social reputation of being very severe. He had indeed at various times made several cutting remarks upon the American continent ; but in commenting upon this fact the best people always added : " But he has been so much abroad, you know."

He was silent for a moment, and then, " Do you dance, Miss Floyd ? " he asked.

" Sometimes."

" Are you fond of dancing ? "

" Very."

" You are not enthusiastic. I asked the same question of a girl at the English Embassy last night, and she told me she considered dancing quite too awfully jolly. But then she admitted that she was too awfully particularly devoted to Strauss."

“Do you think she could possibly have imagined she was ‘adapting her conversation’?” said Barbara, looking at him with a sudden smile.

Her full direct glance was as unconscious as the look of a handsome boy. It amused him; it pleased him on reflection.

“Have you been out very much? I mean, is this your first season?” he asked. He spoke rather quicker and with much more friendliness of manner.

“It is my first ball. Mrs. Damon was so kind about it. I came with Octave. My father is busy; he does not care for society,” said Barbara simply.

“I see,” a dim recollection of some story connected with the name of Floyd coming

back to him. "Shall we not have a turn before the music stops?" he said.

At that moment the doors of the next saloon were thrown open; there was a general rising and rustling of dresses, and a blonde young woman all in white walked rapidly in, followed by several ladies of the Court. The crowd parted before them, leaving an empty space.

"Uncommonly well the princess is looking to-night," said Mr. Dix approvingly. As he spoke the lady in question dropped her fan, there was a general rush forward, but a young man who had stepped out of the crowd was the first to touch it. He presented it to her with a low bow. He drew back again and resumed his position against the wall.

“Who is that man, do you know? I must have seen him somewhere. Good-looking fellow too. He folds his arms like the hero of a French novel.”

“Oh,” said Barbara, turning her eyes in that direction, “I know who he is. He came with us to-night. His name is Count Lalli.”

“A Roman?”

“I don’t know. I suppose so. He was in the Papal Zouaves, Octave told me.”

“Ah, that accounts. But the *genre* is antiquated. It is the *jeune premier* of five years ago,” said Dix indifferently, dropping his eyeglass. “Shall we not have a turn?”

But the next time they stopped dancing Mr. Dix mentioned him again.

“I have made a discovery. Your friend

with the eyes is watching us," he said. "Observe that I say 'us,' and not you, Miss Floyd. I flatter myself that this is generous, particularly at this moment when he is approaching us with evident designs of tearing you away."

"How very absurd," said Barbara lightly, her face still bright with her childlike pleasure in the dancing.

Octave passed on the arm of a gentleman and nodded to them. The lights, the measured pulsing of the music, the very sense and movement of the crowd were working upon Barbara's quickly-touched sympathies. A perfectly new desire for amusement was waking in her. She turned to Lalli when he approached her with the same confident smile.

“I am sent by Madame Damon to beg you not to engage yourself for the cotillon, signorina,” he began, speaking in Italian and with an air of great deference. He glanced at her partner. “Madame Damon is sitting in the next room, where it is cooler——”

“Did she ask you to bring me to her? Oh, thanks,” said Barbara carelessly, putting her hand on his arm.

They walked halfway down the long hall without speaking, then Lalli asked in a low voice, and bending his head towards her :
“Are you happy to-night?”

“Very,” said Barbara, looking up with a slight surprise.

Their eyes met, and for some inexplicable reason the girl felt suddenly embarrassed. In

an instant she had grown conscious of herself, of her hands, of the way she was standing, of the very dress she wore. She looked away with a perceptible effort.

“I do not see Mrs. Damon,” she said.

“No. If you are happy now you were not happy in the carriage, I knew that. I know your face so well. I knew it when I saw you coming down those steps, all in white, with the light shining on your face ; I said to myself ‘There is something troubling her to-night.’ ”

“But, Count Lalli——”

“Ah,” he said, keeping his eyes fixed upon her, and in the same low voice, “I could tell you things which would astonish you. I could tell you where you have been every day for the last month. Yesterday

you drove out with Miss Damon; on Thursday you were in St. John Lateran at vespers. You had with you an old woman whom you called Margherita. You stayed for the benediction. You wore a dark green dress trimmed with fur, and there was fur and something shining—it looked like steel—on your hat. As you were coming out you stopped to speak to an old lady.”

“But—but this is absurd!” said Barbara, flushing and feeling bewildered. It seemed to her that she was angry as well.

“Is it true or not?”

“I cannot see what possible interest——”

“It is true then?”

She dropped his arm and threw back her head a little, and looked at him rather

proudly. "Anyone might have seen me coming out of church," she said. But it is impossible to say why she should have selected this precise moment to remember the story Octave had told her about this man. There was a scrap of red ribbon in his button-hole. Was that the ribbon of the medal he had won? He was so tall and well set up. How must he have looked, standing at the head of his men, defending the narrow bridge? He had seen curious things to be so preoccupied with the small movements of a girl's daily life.

She opened her fan and shut it.

"If Mrs. Damon——"

"I will go and look for Mrs. Damon, if you wish me to," he said instantly. "If I can find a place to leave you." He

looked about him with a wide keen glance which seemed to take in every face in the room. "There should be a window-seat behind that scarlet curtain," he said.

And there was a seat. The window looked out upon the low wide stairway of the Capitol. The moon was shining on the silent square. It was shining on the statue of Marcus Aurelius. It was after midnight. The wind was hushed. Not a shadow moved. Only the dead emperor was mounting guard over his sleeping city, in his old free familiar companionship with the night and the changeless stars.

She sat down and turned her face to the window with a sudden revulsion of mood.

"Ah," she said softly, with a quick

sigh of pleasure, "how beautiful that is !"

Lalli waited a minute. She had quite forgotten he was to leave her. He waited with the folds of the curtain in his hand. He gave another quick searching glance around him. He let the curtain fall; he stepped into the recess; he came and stood silently beside her.

"It is quiet enough now. But do you know the last time I was here, Miss Floyd?" he said. "It was a year ago in September—a year and five months ago. We had been all the morning at the Porta Pia. Later, I was sent down here with despatches. The Italian troops were entering; my colonel kept me here. You cannot imagine what it is like to be in the Campidoglio again. I

remember this room," he said, and stopped abruptly. Barbara turned her head and looked at him. "Do you see that line of light beyond the statue? between the two lamps? We made a barricade of mattresses just there; and we waited. At every instant the cannon were firing; at each gun a piece of the city wall—of the walls of our city—of our Rome—was falling. And they made us wait. They told us to be patient. And we were young men, Miss Floyd, and soldiers, and this was our city they were taking. Oh yes," he said, and he laughed, and there was a curious look on his face as he said it; "oh yes, we were very patient."

But she was paying very little attention to his appearance. She had taken off her gloves. She was bending forward with

parted lips. The moonlight fell full upon her face.

“Go on,” she said.

“Oh,” he said sullenly, “what is the use? You were here. You know what happened. We waited; we waited until the troops came. I climbed up there on that statue and looked over. There were a hundred of us at least. We had ammunition, and the square was packed full. There were women there—to see us surrender; and children, who were being taught to laugh. If I had had my way,” the young man said, his face darkening suddenly, “they should have been taught to jeer at us. Only I think not many of them would have gone home.”

Barbara clasped her hands together; her

eyes moved uneasily. "Please do not say a thing like that."

"Why not? *They* said we were frightened." He bit his lip and stared gloomily out of the window. "After all," he said, turning to her suddenly and speaking in French, "*C'était de la canaille, tout ça.* It was the populace who had come to see their masters, the gentlemen, surrender."

"It was liberty coming into Italy," the girl said, looking at him fearlessly, "Count Lalli—— But everything seems so difficult," she said. "There was our own war at home; that was ten years ago. I was ten years old when it began. I remember it as if it were yesterday. They sent me away from home. We are Southerners, you know; and we were in the wrong, just as you were

here. We were fighting against other people's rights. It was all wrong; and yet when you remember how the people you care the most for have suffered for it—— It is so difficult to see how things are right when they hurt people you care about."

"*Væ victis*. And there is one thing left for us now, and that is silence," said Lalli rather bitterly, folding his arms and looking down. He had not understood very much of what she was saying. Possibly his ideas may have been somewhat vague on the subject of the American Civil War. "After all it is something to be silent," he said, turning his dark melancholy eyes upon Barbara, and smiling at her. He looked very noble as he said it.

Another waltz had begun.

“I wish I could ask you to dance,” said Lalli; “but since I was hurt——” He touched his shoulder.

“Oh,” she said eagerly, “I don’t want to dance. I should never have imagined you would dance—here.” She hesitated. “Do you know—I wonder a little,” she said shyly, “I wonder at your coming here at all—an old soldier of the Pope. It is very fine to be an Italian like that—to love Italy better than one’s own personal pride.”

There was nothing in Lalli’s past experiences—and he was not a man wanting in experience—there was nothing to prevent his making a mistake here.

“I knew that you were coming. I came because I wanted to see you,” he said impressively.

Barbara flushed a little and drew back. It did not need the sudden stiffness in her manner, nor the tone of her voice as she said: "I beg your pardon. I thought we were speaking seriously," to show him that he had miscalculated the effect of his words. He was not a man accustomed to making such blunders. But here was something new. And there was something attractive too about this girl who talked to you at a ball as if you and she were fellow-students in some musty class-room; who turned red and white over old stories of men fighting; and looked as calmly at you, with those large clear candid eyes of hers, as if she were—your younger brother! He glanced at Barbara's ungloved hand which was lying upon her lap. Perhaps the thought crossed

his mind at that moment that it would be pleasant to feel the shy touch of that delicate hand seeking his. He belonged to a school whose creeds were very simple. And then the first part of this evening had been dull—worse than that, he had been overlooked. In interfering to take Barbara away from her partner—Barbara, who had never once noticed him in the carriage—he had enjoyed the assertion of his claim to a degree which would somewhat have astonished that gentleman. But with all these mingled motives for speaking there was hardly an appreciable pause before he answered :

“You would have a right to be angry with me if that were simply an impertinent compliment. It is nothing of the kind.” He hesitated an instant. The women he

had known were *not* averse to compliments. "Things — everything around me has changed of late," he said abruptly. "A year ago I was an officer in the finest service in the world. We defended the Church. Life was opening out in every direction before me. I was young, sure of promotion," he glanced quickly down at the girl's averted profile, "and I was madly in love," he said. "Now—— You are looking at those old steps, Miss Floyd; but let me tell you it is not only our ancestors who have dragged their prisoners to their triumphs on the Capitol."

"But surely — surely you might have taken service again," she suggested rather timidly.

"Yes; I could have taken service under

the orders of men who had insulted us. I might have allowed some little Piedmontese farmer to give me orders—to me, a Roman ! I had a religion, Miss Floyd, and they have defamed it. I had a sovereign, and they have put him in prison. You may call that liberty if you like ; I call it the desecration of all I have ever believed in ; of what I learned as a child—of what—— Basta ! I should ask your pardon for wearying you with my poor affairs,” he said. He folded his arms and stood leaning against the wall with his gaze moodily fixed upon the ground. But he was very well aware of the change which had come over the expression of her face. His plastic southern temperament was already becoming responsive to the charm of this new influence.

Above all things he wanted to make her lean forward and look up at him again with that clear direct glance, as she had looked when he was telling her about the taking of the town. There would be something decidedly satisfactory in receiving such a look for one's own merits. And there was really no insincerity worth speaking of in this account of his situation. The accidents of our own lives naturally impress us as striking and picturesque, as the smallest feature will seem full of interest in limited and much-studied landscapes. Probably there is no person more appreciative of small natural beauties than the owner of a perfectly flat tract of land. There is many an artificial mound in a Dutch burgomaster's garden which has excited more pride of

possession than the Alps. It seemed to Lalli quite simple that Barbara should be impressed by the importance of these revelations.

“And then,” he went on presently as if speaking to himself, “when I have lived to see the end of everything—of love, and religion, and ambition—when I am tired of life and of all it does not bring me, I see a face which seems to mean something to me among all the other indifferent unmeaning faces. I meet a privileged being—*un essere privilegiato della vita*—and for one moment I forget the forms of ceremony. I say to myself: Here is someone who will let you speak to her frankly, from your inward self, who will understand your dreams, your disappointments; who will give you courage

to go on living by the mere fact of letting you know her, and who, some day perhaps, will say to you : The whole world abandoned you, but I never abandoned you. And there is my hand, and you may take it safely. It is the hand of a friend."

He glanced at Barbara's flushed and downcast face.

" *Væ victis!* I have said it before and I say it again. I have made a mistake. It shall be the last. And I beg your pardon, mademoiselle."

"Oh," said Barbara impulsively, in her full tender voice, "if I thought that really—if I were sure it made any real difference——"

Something curious happened just then. They were standing, as I have said, in the

recess of a window. The curtain which Lalli had dropped had been pushed to one side by the dancers, but now as the music stopped stray couples began promenading up and down. The first who passed glanced curiously in at the occupant of the window-seat, but before the next two rejoined them—and indeed these were Octave in a flutter of rose-coloured ribbons and Mr. Dix—before these two passed by, Lalli had pushed the heavy folds together carelessly with his foot so that only he himself could be seen, Barbara was entirely hidden behind the crimson drapery. It was a scientific little manœuvre, and very well executed. He turned complacently to Barbara for approval. But it was evident from her unconscious look that she had noticed nothing;

indeed, her whole mind was possessed with a vivid imaginative pity before the spectacle of this baffled life. The smile vanished instantly from his features.

“You simply could never know what your friendship would be to me,” he said beseechingly. “No woman has ever cared for me in that way—since my mother died.”

“Ah—yes !” said Barbara, clasping her hands and looking at him. All the emotions which had made this evening memorable seemed to rush together and centre on this point. They had had this great experience in common. It never occurred to her to remember to what widely different results the same experience may lead in diverging natures. She looked at Lalli : perhaps one would need to be a girl of twenty again

to realise how thoroughly she believed in him.

They said very little more to each other after that. He had gained his point, and was satisfied. And indeed it was not more than a few minutes before Octave came up and joined them. She was looking radiant.

“I want to introduce Mr. Hardinge to you, Barbara. And Mr. Lexeter,” she said.

The two gentlemen bowed.

“The princess is gone. Mamma thinks we had better not stay for the cotillon. Do you mind, dear? Have you been dancing much?” Miss Damon asked.

She looked rather sharply at Lalli's impassive countenance when Barbara answered she had not been waltzing. Otherwise she made no comment.

“People are going already,” she said carelessly. “Clifford Dix left you his compliments. He seemed quite cut up by your leaving him. He said he never yet had understood what Italians found to talk about to American girls. I promised I would ask you. Nonsense, Barbara! I told you of it before. He doesn’t understand a word of English. Oh Mr. Lexeter! You know people. Who is that man over there—the tall man with curls? There, he is speaking to that lady in black.”

“That man?” said Lexeter. “He is an Englishman. His name is Perkins—Archibald Douglas Perkins. I’ve seen his card. I wonder you don’t know him, Miss Damon. He is an authority on all the fine arts, including the lost art of

selling pictures. Did I tell you he painted? Oh yes, he is a professional painter. He is very successful they tell me. But I wouldn't give much for his character, if his pictures are the least of his crimes."

"I did not know he was an artist."

"There ought to be another word invented," remarked Mr. Hardinge lazily; "something to describe the fellows who pursue their Art, as they call it, for the sole sake of picking her pockets."

"Ah," said Octave, smiling and shaking her head; "you are not in a kind temper to-night."

"This morning, if you please, Miss Damon. It is half-past two by my watch—which is Lexeter's watch, by-the-way; and it is always slow."

Count Lalli had been following the pantomime attentively.

"*Già*," he said, taking out his watch and looking at it; "after half-past two."

"Well, we will hope mamma has been enjoying the evening," said Octave rather carelessly.

They all came out of the cloak-room together to look for the carriage, and Barbara had taken Mr. Hardinge's arm. He shook hands with her in quite a friendly manner at the door.

"There is something well-bred and simple about that friend of Miss Damon's; she pleased me," he remarked confidentially to Lexeter, as they paused to light their cigars before starting down the hill.

"She has a fine face, certainly—a very

impassioned face," the elder man said slowly. He pulled up the collar of his ulster about his ears.

"So she pleased you, you young pasha," he repeated, looking at the lad with an odd ironical smile. "But let me tell you that there won't be many things which will have it left in their power to please or to displease you either, my boy, if you persist much longer in walking about Rome at night in a greatcoat of the thickness of a sheet of letter-paper. There is such an action possible as making use of a little common sense, Hardinge. Let me recommend the fact to your notice."

"Oh," said Hardinge carelessly, "nothing ever hurts me. Come on."

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and they started down the hill together in the moonlight. The older man walked as if he were slightly lame.

Meanwhile Mrs. Damon's carriage was driving home in an opposite direction, rattling past the still solitary-looking ruins—solitary in the midst of all the crowding alien life, and down dark silent streets. The heavy doors of the Palazzo del Governo Vecchio were made fast. Lalli sprang out and knocked. The hollow vibration sounded far down the street and the horses started at it.

"The porter must be asleep," said Octave idly, after waiting a moment.

"Let me get out. Mrs. Damon will be catching cold with that open door,"

said Barbara. "Are you tired, Mrs. Damon? You have been so very kind." She stooped and pressed her lips against Octave's smooth cheek. "I shall see you again to-morrow, dear."

Lalli knocked a second time.

"I hear someone coming," he said.

He stamped his feet hard against the cold stones and looked at Barbara.

"Pull that cloak closer up about your throat," he said smiling; and what an amount of confidence and solicitude there was expressed in the curt familiarity of his speech.

"Barbara looked very well to-night," remarked Octave lazily, glancing out at the white-clad figure in the moonlight.

"Ah," said Mrs. Damon, speaking in

a muffled voice from behind the handkerchief she was holding before her mouth; "poor Barbara! She always needs a little more trimming."

"You really ought to speak to Mr. Floyd about his porter, mamma. It is outrageous. Ah, I see the door opening at last."

"There is the light coming," Lalli was saying at the same moment.

"Yes. I am sorry you were kept waiting. Good - night," said Barbara, putting out her hand. The motion loosened some flowers fastened in her dress. They fell to the ground.

"Oh, that is nothing — only some withered violets," she said hurriedly.

He held her hand close in his firm warm grasp.

“The girl in my dream spoke differently when she gave me her hand,” he said in a low voice.

She disengaged her fingers and turned away abruptly without answering. The sleepy porter handed her the light and a massive key. She took them both automatically. As she turned she saw Lalli stoop down, pick up the flower which had fallen, and put it away carefully in the breast-pocket of his coat. Then she went upstairs. She unlocked the barred and iron-bound door. There was a light burning on the drawing-room table. She came forward slowly, her white cloak falling in long straight lines about her, and set her candle down, and rested her gloved hands upon the edge of the table and looked around

her. The quick rattle of the carriage sounded far down the street, and then all was silent, with the peculiar warm close stillness of a sleeping house. There was a litter of her own things upon the table—a disorder of gloves, a fan, some flowers she had meant to wear, still tied together in a glass. She looked at them with bright dilated eyes. They had not had time to fade while so much had happened.

She pulled off her gloves slowly. She walked over to the window and opened it. The night air rushed in, cool and sharp. The moonlight lay cold like snow upon the whitened house-tops. The stars were shining frostily against a dark clear sky. She looked up at them with a curious thrill—a curious exultant sense of changed ex-

perience. Life, not the life of books, not the sympathetic entering into another being's past, but life as keen personal experience seemed drawing nearer to her. And youth awoke in her triumphant; expectation started into being, full grown; and the voice that was calling to her was confused and luring and irresistible as the voice of the treacherous sea.

CHAPTER III.

IT was a pleasant house to lunch at—the Damons'. There was always a bright wood fire in the small drawing-room. There were flowers on the table. Octave's piano was standing open ; Octave's birds were chirping by the window ; it was Octave herself who attended to many of the details of this small and dainty housekeeping. She sat at her own place now, pouring out black coffee, and the sunlight was shining on her rose-red ribbons, and making a nimbus of dusky gold about her dark curly hair. A lap-dog was shivering before the hearth,

but there was also a thin blue haze suggestive of cigarette-smoke to counteract the strictly feminine character of the room. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the day after the Charity Ball. Perhaps it was the most natural thing under such circumstances that one should be discussing one's friends.

"The Floyds?" Mrs. Damon was saying, poising her spoon upon the edge of her coffee-cup, and turning her dark eyes meditatively towards Lexeter. "I have known about them all my life. Mr. Floyd—you have never seen him? Well, he is from Beaufort, South Carolina. I suppose even an Englishman knows what that means. The Floyds had very large estates before the war."

“Which presupposes that they have lost them since?” said Hardinge idly. He was watching Octave pour cream into her saucer to feed her dog. It was impossible for a man with eyes in his head—and his were keen young eyes—it was impossible not to notice the short exquisite curves of the girl’s chin and throat as she laid her cheek down against the little creature’s head. Perhaps it was equally impossible to resist the impulse to lean forward and stroke that glossy head a moment later. “An illustration of the force of a bad example,” he said in a stage aside.

“Mamma says we look alike, Vix and I; two useless creatures with curly heads. Do you see the likeness?” Octave asked in the same tone, lifting the dog up on her

shoulder and pressing his black nose against her dimpling cheek.

“He has been unfortunate, poor Mr. Floyd.” Mrs. Damon lowered her voice, and glanced at the two young people complacently. “His wife ran away and left him. She is dead now—but such things leave a stain. It is very unfortunate for Barbara. It makes a prejudice. It is certainly very unfortunate for Barbara. But I never blamed her for it, I’m sure.”

“Well, hardly,” said Lexeter, successfully suppressing a smile.

He poured himself out a glass of water and drank it.

“Man is said to be the only animal afflicted with an appetite for irrelevant knowledge. I wonder if that can have

anything to do with one's anxious scrutiny of the reasons which cause our neighbours' wives to run away?"

"Oh, I never knew her," said Mrs. Damon quickly. "It was a long time ago. Why, Barbara was a mere baby then, and they have been living in Rome at least—— Octave, when did Mr. Floyd tell us he came to Rome? Do you remember?"

"Ten years ago, at least. When the war began. But Barbara has only been here—let me see. Barbara left school when she was fifteen, and she is a year older than I, so she must be twenty now. Barbara has been here five years," said Octave carelessly.

"I am admiring your arithmetical mind, Miss Damon," said Hardinge, leaning back in his chair and lighting another cigarette.

It was an open question if she were not even more charming so; her head thrown back and her lips parted with that air of pretty, positive wisdom. "And as for what we should call at Oxford your powers of ratiocination——"

"The Floyds are such terribly proud people," said Mrs. Damon, thoughtfully. "*Poinct fallir*, that is their device. Such things seem to run in some families."

"Or to run away from them," suggested Lexeter, looking at the crest on his fork.

"Ah! you are severe," said Mrs. Damon, smiling languidly.

But there was real kindness in the impulse which made her add: "I have always heard that there was no blame attaching to Mr. Floyd. He was desperately in love with

his wife, and he made the mistake of living alone with her on the plantation, with his old books and stuff. She was a gay handsome girl, fond of pleasure—and he is not at all a Southerner in his tastes. You have never seen him ? Ah, he is very ugly, poor man ! But a thorough gentleman, of course. He has the real Southern courtesy ; we hardly know it in the North.” She looked down and fastened the clasp of her bracelet pensively. “ Yes ; one cannot help feeling sorry for poor Barbara,” she said.

But no one meeting Barbara accidentally that morning would have found it easy to realise that here was a subject for compassion in this tall healthy-looking girl, who was walking so lightly down the street, with the sun shining full upon her pale and some-

what haughty face. It was a face which underwent many transformations in the course of a day, and now, as they turned out of the Corso into a quieter street, she began talking carelessly to her companion, who was carrying a small basket, and there was a very eager and well-pleased look in her large clear eyes.

“For you know, Margherita,” she was saying rather confidentially, “it has been my dream all these years to go out riding on the Campagna. And I never could have done it without Octave. We always rode at home—at my own home, in the South. I can remember going all over the plantation on a pony before I was six years old. But papa does not like doing the things now he did then,” she added half to herself.

"*Giù*," said Margherita affirmatively. "The signore padre is not so young as he was," she said, crossing her yellow handkerchief more tightly over her handsome shoulders. "One can see by looking at him he is not strong."

"Papa has always looked like that," said Barbara quickly.

The old woman shook her head. "My eyes may not be so young as yours, but they have seen more things, Miss Barbara," she said emphatically. She felt the keen dramatic interest of the people—that interest which has never been dulled by reading—in all possible calamities.

"Oh, but that is all nonsense, you know," said Barbara hastily, putting up her gloved hand to her lips with a motion which was

habitual to her in moments of mental excitement.

But the very suggestion had brought a cloud over her face. She was still preoccupied and inclined to be silent when they stopped before the high iron grating of the hospital gate. Margherita rang the bell. The door was immediately opened by a man in a blue apron, who inquired their errand, and conducted them across the court. The girl glanced rather timidly around at the bare gravelled space set about with orange-trees in pots.

"I have a permission to see the woman who was brought here yesterday," she said.

Their guide nodded and rang a bell.

"Female ward," he explained briefly to the white-aproned *infirmière* who answered

the summons. He leaned against the doorpost and looked idly after Barbara, with his hands in his pockets, and holding the end of a straw between his thick good-natured lips.

They went in under a low archway, and up a broad shallow flight of stairs. The walls were painted of a dull yellow colour. There was a long bare corridor with a line of doors opening out on either side.

“If you will wait here a moment I will call the sister,” their conductor said, and left them. They waited. The building was perfectly silent. The air was damp and lifeless. The light seemed to creep reluctantly in at the small square windows near the roof. The sordid yellow walls seemed to shut out every remembrance of the joyous

world of sunshine and breezy blue skies they had just left.

“It is like a prison, this,” said Margherita, crossing herself and speaking under her breath.

One of the doors near them suddenly opened, and an attendant came out carrying a pile of bandages on a tray. He glanced curiously at the strangers, but made no comment, passing on and leaving the door still open behind him.

“Look, signorina,” said Margherita, plucking suddenly at her dress.

There was a cot drawn up close to the entrance. The man who was lying on it had his face hidden ; his arm, all swathed in bandages, was fastened to a cord descending from the ceiling, it swung there helpless, with

a curious look of disconnected suffering, as if its owner had long since ceased to feel much personal interest in that piteous inert weight.

And now a rosy-cheeked sister of charity joined them—a little plump woman with a bunch of keys rattling at her girdle, and a perpetual smile playing under the frilled borders of her cap. She listened to Barbara's explanation with her head on one side, and her round eyes sparkling like the eyes of some small attentive bird.

“*Benissimo, benissimo.* It is number thirty-nine you want—number thirty-nine. The woman who came in yesterday,” she said briskly.

They followed her down another passage and into a long, bare, whitewashed room.

One or two nuns in short black dresses were moving up and down between the double row of narrow cots ; they looked with a dull curiosity at the visitors ; once or twice their guide, who seemed to be a person of importance, stopped as they passed to give an order or make a remark.

Number thirty-nine was a small black-haired woman, with a decent and anxious face. She half lifted her heavy eyelids when the nurse bent over and spoke to her, but there came no light of recognition in the tired eyes.

“That is what I told the doctor. I said it the moment I set my eyes upon her, as the men were bringing her in. She will never last the two days out, I said,” the sister commented, rubbing her keys thought-

fully and looking down upon the narrow bed.

“Well, the Lord have mercy upon her soul. And on his too, poor man. He was always so full of his jokes, *poveretto*! always a pleasant word for whoever went into his shop. This will make a difference in the street,” said Margherita regretfully.

“But is there really nothing one might do for her? It seems—it is impossible she should be dying,” said Barbara, her face flushing suddenly.

At that instant there had come to her a sharp remembrance of having seen this poor creature a week—but was it so much as a week?—ago, standing at the door of her little shop, playing with her child. She looked down with a quick sharp pang of

compassion at the honest hardworking hands lying listlessly upon the white counterpane of the bed. Their work was over, the woman was busy dying now ; her familiar insignificant face grew suddenly absorbed, dignified by a look of strange remoteness. Barbara looked down at the dying woman, at the long line of livid commonplace faces, of white and rigid forms. Between each bed a small black crucifix was fastened against the wall. There was not the sound of a voice, not a movement, in all the length of the clean white room. Each motionless figure lay self-centered in its own experience of pain ; isolated and apathetic ; silenced beneath the weight of this unintelligible world.

She stood a moment there looking at it all with her clear grave eyes. It was a

moment which had its effect on Barbara's later action. It brought its own revelation of ardent and world-embracing pity ; that pity, which, after five-and-twenty, is perhaps the predominant passion of really imaginative natures.

“ Ah, but it must be strange, living here always ? ” said Margherita curiously.

“ Eh ! ” The sister shrugged her little fat shoulders expressively. “ It is a life like another. The doctors are a trial, certainly. The food is not bad. But you get accustomed to everything ; the water ends by passing under the bridge with time.” She glanced at Barbara and lowered her voice. “ Your young lady is a foreigner ? *Si vede!* I knew it by her dress. Ah, that is English, I said to myself. She is English, perhaps ? ”

“Other than English. My padroni are great people in the country that is farthest away of all,” said Margherita, spreading her hands dramatically. After that a map seemed but a mean measure of distance.

The novelty of this experience had filled the old woman’s mind with quite a pleasant tumult of ideas adapted for speedy communication. She was talking eagerly all the way down the stairs, and after they had passed out into the cheerful bustle of the sunny street.

“Jesu Maria ! but one had quite forgotten the colour of the blessed sun,” she said, looking up at the expanse of fresh moving blue and white sky between the palace roofs.

They had come out again on the Corso, near the Piazza del Popolo.

“I must go up for a minute to see about Miss Maclean,” Barbara had said.

They climbed up another narrow, dark, interminable stair. At the top of the tall house there was a small square landing. A spotless cotton curtain hung before the single window, shutting out the view of the huddled innumerable house-tops, with here and there a tower rising above them, and here and there the black swaying cypress of some quiet convent close. Across the bridges and the yellow river, the flag was fluttering, a mere red spot in the sunlight, above the massive roundness of St. Angelo; higher up against the sky, there was another roundness, the dark tops of the pines of Monte Mario. To-day Barbara never drew aside the trim spot-

less curtain. She rang the bell. A loud pleasant voice called out :

“ *Chi è?* ” And then an iron plate was shot back in the door, and somebody stooped to look through the peep-hole.

“ Eh, miss, the Lord be gude to us, but this is a bonny sight for sair een ! ”

The door was thrown open suddenly, and a decent elderly Scotchwoman appeared in the entrance, smiling a broad welcome and smoothing her white apron with both hands. “ Eh, but the leddies will be fine and vexed to miss seeing you, Miss Barbara, and you coming up all those stairs. ”

“ Never mind that, Jessie, tell them I shall come again very soon. And how is Miss Janet ? ” said Barbara smiling.

“ Fairly well, the day. And to think

that I should have called to you through yon mouse-trap," said Jessie, looking reproachfully at the door, and beginning to polish off the plate with her apron. "Eh, but it's an ill wark changing the custom in this Papist country, Miss Barbara."

Barbara laughed.

"Don't forget to give Miss Janet my love," she said, turning to go, not without a feeling of relief. Speech, just then, seemed at once difficult and superfluous. She walked on rapidly towards home, her mind still wholly absorbed in a vivid reproduction of the faces she had just seen. It even occurred to her at that moment, that here in the hospital, might be the opportunity for the simplest and most direct expression of that yearning good-will towards her fellow-creatures, which

had been growing up in her from her earliest childish days. It is surely a prejudice which leads us so exclusively to connect the idea of philanthropy with middle-aged gentlemen, and well authenticated bank accounts. No spirit could have turned with more ardent importunity to every possibility of impersonal action than that which was animating this young girl as she passed along these old gloomy Roman streets. For those earliest impressions of hers were all inextricably interwoven with enthusiastic recollections of a larger ideal of life and devotion and duty than commonly falls to a girl's share. She had grown up in the midst of a great national struggle, at a time when the heroic possibilities of life had become passionately

present ; the stories of her childhood had been stories of chivalric endeavour ; a belief in the likelihood of contemporary heroism was as much, and as unconsciously, a part of her experience, as her vision of the early lilacs in spring, or the light of morning skies over the summer fields, through which her childish feet had passed. Her large and loving heart had never entirely lost this early sense of fellowship with all effort and all disappointment.

This morning she looked a little wistfully at the many faces of strangers which she passed, the thought coming and then returning involuntarily again and again, that she knew of no one on whose sympathy in these things she could count. On that March morning the world was still more

than nine years behind its present point of satisfactoriness. Even had Barbara's school education not been of the slightest possible texture, it was only in the highest centres of civilisation that young ladies had begun substituting the mastery of the Greek irregular verbs to the attempted coercion of eligible suitors. There was no one in the Roman set of those days who would have listened to any expression of a girl's impulse towards some form of life-long sacrifice without recommending matrimony.

"I know so well how it would be," she was thinking, as she walked on homewards, turning at the street corners automatically, and lending an inattentive ear to Margherita's unwearying strain of gossip, "if I should even speak of the hospital, Mrs. Damon would go

to papa and suggest the urgent need of my entering society. Society! as if what I wanted was the opportunity of showing my new dresses to the most eligible young men who have come to Rome for the winter. And yet, after all, what else is there for me to do?" she went on thinking, a little sadly. "Papa has his books——"

They were passing under the great shadow of the Pantheon. Barbara looked up involuntarily; her eyes fell upon a face she was conscious of having seen before; she looked again. The gentleman smiled and took off his hat. It was Mr. Lexeter. He came slowly up the steps and spoke to her.

"The gate is opened. Are you too old a Roman to come in?" he asked.

“Is it not rather a sign of stupidity to grow accustomed to great things?” said Barbara, looking at him gravely.

There were candles lighted on the nearest altar. Margherita kneeled down before them and crossed herself in a business-like manner.

“I have been lunching at Mrs. Damon’s,” said Lexeter, looking attentively at the tall slender figure in the tight fur-trimmed dress walking carelessly beside him, and remembering Mrs. Damon’s remarks. “I left Hardinge there, settling something about a riding-party; I hope you mean to be persuaded to join us, Miss Floyd.”

Her eyes grew suddenly bright. “Oh, but I should like it of all things,” she said.

“Is there any part of the Campagna which you particularly care to see?” her companion asked carelessly enough. He was swinging his stick in his hand and looking up at the blue circle of sky above them.

“Oh, do you think we might go to Ostia? I have not seen a pine-forest since we left home.” Her face flushed a little. “But it would take all day; perhaps Mrs. Damon——”

“Mrs. Damon shall be reasoned with,” said Lexeter confidently, looking at her with a smile. It occurred to him it would be worth taking some trouble to give this girl a pleasure. Of a sudden, and without clearly understanding how it had happened, he found himself speaking to her as to an

old friend whom he had not met for years. "But you know--you know all about it," he was saying constantly.

"Yes ; I know," Barbara answered simply. She looked at him from time to time, and already there was a pleasant sense of familiarity about the peculiarity of his gait. She was amused at first, but presently she began to like his somewhat imperative way of expressing his opinions.

"I cannot imagine how it was that I mistook you for an American last night," she said abruptly.

"It is Hardinge's fault. Hardinge has been educated at Oxford, *il est plus royaliste que le roi* ; no mere Englishman would have the chance of a show beside him," Lexeter said, with rather an amused look.

They had nearly completed the circuit of the great gray dome. There was service going on at that farthest altar. They paused, half-idly, to listen to it. The thin nasal chanting of the priest reached them but indistinctly at this distance; the blue film of incense-smoke was lost somewhere in those sombre depths; the sunshine poured in through the great round skylight; from time to time the shadows of a cloud passed over the time-worn marble of the floor. They looked at each other and smiled with a sense of common pleasure in the stillness, in the glisten of the light along the old polished columns and on the empty shrines.

“By Jove!” said Lexeter, with a sudden air of disgust, pointing to the tinselled

gewgaws and artificial flowers on one of these altars, "it's enough to make a man turn Communist on the spot! By Jove, Clough is right :

All the incongruous things of past incompatible ages
Seem to be treasured up here to make fools of present
and future.

I never come in here without vowing I shall never look at the place by daylight again. There is something irritating about the embodied patience of those walls; I want them to fall."

"Ah," said Barbara, shaking her head playfully, "I am afraid you would make a very poor public monument."

He was frowning, and this unchecked evidence of bad temper seemed to give the last affirmative touch to the assurance of

liking and sympathetic understanding which had sprung up between them.

“I am sure Margherita thinks you have been scolding me,” Barbara said, turning with a smile to give him her hand at the door.

The smile was still on her face as she passed down the street. Things seemed to be growing easier. Now these riding-parties, for instance ; if one wanted to show any particular friendliness to a person in trouble, what would be easier than to invite him to join one of these excursions ? “It was certainly a great mistake not to have been more explicit with—with Count Lalli last night.” It was so awkward, the girl reflected gravely, when things were left so that they absolutely necessitated another interview. She looked slightly defiant as the

necessity of this further explanation began forcing itself more urgently upon her mind. Lalli's words and look recurred more vividly to her imagination. She was living over again the scenes of last night, for—the thought would obtrude itself almost like a regret—it would probably be some time before they met again. Indeed, all that depended upon Octave; certainly he knew their house, but nothing had been said about calling.

In one of those very streets through which she was passing two young men were seated together in one of the highest rooms of a tall dingy house. But, notwithstanding their elevation, there was nothing pinched or poverty-stricken about the aspect of these rooms. To be sure there was no fire in the

small iron grate, but an elaborately-embroidered screen hung down from the mantel-piece to hide this absence. There were various carefully-arranged trophies of pipes and daggers and shining firearms suspended from the wall. The small hard sofa bore marks of frequent usage. A liqueur-case stood, half-opened, in one corner; the set of swinging shelves was fairly crowded with paper-covered novels; a few French books had even found a temporary resting-place on the corner of the small toilette-table in the inner room, before which Count Lalli was standing. To Anglo-Saxon eyes there might have been something a trifle absurd in the contrast between the keen soldierly face of this tall athletic-looking young man and the elaborate array of small pots of pomatum and perfumes and microscopic brushes of which

he had evidently been making use. His actual companion is clearly not of this opinion. Indeed he has thrown more than one glance of respectful interest at all this display since first he took up that position, which seems to combine at once perfect personal comfort with a frank disregard of outline, upon the corner of the bed.

“It seems rather hard, *per Bacco!* that you should have been the one to meet her,” he says presently, without removing the cigar from his mouth, and with the air of continuing a previous conversation. “Rather too hard, by Jove!”

“Oh,” said Lalli deliberately, walking over to the fireplace and beginning to look for a match, “you would not have stood a chance in any case.” He lighted a cigarette and puffed at it slowly. “By-the-way,

there is something you must do for me," he added with affected carelessness.

"Such as——?"

"It is only keeping that confounded tongue of yours quiet. The fact is, I—well, I made use of the valuable information you had given me. You have kept me so much *au courant* of the fair Barbara's movements—you must admit I have been a patient listener, *caro mio*—that I found myself in the position of being able to give her a very fairly accurate report of the various places she has been to this week. Women like that sort of thing, as I've often told you."

"Do you mean to say," said Borgia, sitting up abruptly and glaring at him; "do you mean to say you told her this about yourself?"

"Exactly, my dear boy."

“That you made her believe that it was *you* who had been admiring her? *You* who had been going to every blessed church in Rome on the chance of meeting her? *You* who——”

“I — myself. Precisely. She seemed quite pleased by it,” said Lalli, laying down his cigarette and smiling reflectively. “And why shouldn’t I have done it?” he said, turning with sudden sharpness upon his companion. “Wouldn’t you have done it yourself in my place? Wouldn’t you have done it? Eh? Tell the truth for once. (*Di’la verit .*) Wouldn’t you have done it?”

Borgia’s jaw relaxed. “I call it a confounded shame. That’s all,” he said sulkily, kicking the rug aside with his foot, and looking sullen defiance at his leader.

But for all that they parted on the best of terms within five minutes.

“I shall see you to-night at the theatre of course?” Cesco suggested quite cheerfully, taking some half-faded violets out of a glass on his writing-table and pinning them carefully into his coat. And although Borgia could not refrain from glancing rather viciously at these flowers, and saying: “That is what you got for betraying me, I suppose,” in an aggrieved tone; still it was with a comparatively resigned manner that he watched his friend hail a passing street cab and drive off in it at the break-neck pace he habitually affected.

We all have our ideals. It is possible that even our least worthy actions may arouse some admiring and imitative echo in

some subordinate mind. Cesco Lalli was Marcantonio Borgia's ideal. The gallant presence of the dashing and discontented ex-officer reigned as paramount over his weaker imagination as the solitary statue of some Polynesian god, standing supreme upon his uninhabited island, if one may still be allowed to call an island uninhabited when it is peopled by monkeys ?

This is how it happened, that when Barbara reached home she heard the sound of voices in the drawing-room. A tall figure sprang respectfully to his feet as she entered, and the first thing she was conscious of was the fretful tone in her father's voice as he said :

“ Barbara ! don't you recognise your friend, Count Lalli ? ”

CHAPTER IV.

SHE gave him her hand without a moment's hesitation.

“Oh,” she said, looking at him with some slight surprise, but speaking quite cheerfully ; “it is curious to see you ; I was thinking about you only a moment ago.”

“You were thinking something complimentary, I hope ?”

“Well, I am not sure,” she began a little doubtfully, looking up at him with the dawning of a smile. “I——”

Her eyes fell suddenly upon the bunch of withered violets in his coat. Her cheek

flushed and she was silent. She sat down rather hurriedly and began taking off her gloves.

“Count Lalli has been giving me much information about the Campagna. He has been telling me of certain places of interest I have not visited as yet,” observed Mr. Floyd, turning with explanatory courtesy to his daughter. “For instance, he mentioned——”

“*Già!* I was speaking of Bracciano,” the young man interrupted rather eagerly; “I was telling you about it, Mr. Floyd, was I not?”

Mr. Floyd assented gravely. It was impossible to say what he thought of the interruption, or, indeed, to understand in the least in what light he was contemplating

this new and audacious visitor. He sat well back in his old red armchair, with his short legs crossed one over the other, and the tips of his fingers pressed together. He conversed with perfect civility. From time to time he turned his keen pale eyes upon the young man's face and let them rest there with deliberate scrutiny. That was all. Not even his daughter could have detected any trace of annoyance or even of fatigue in the tone of his soft and somewhat monotonous voice.

“I was speaking of Bracciano. The castle is something stupendous. You ought by all means to see it. It is a part of the country which strangers do not often visit. I wish I could persuade Signor Floyd to come and have a look at it. Imagine,

signorina, a castle of the tenth century ; perhaps even earlier. Tenth century ! One does not see a thing like that every day."

"Of the fifteenth, I fancy," said Mr. Floyd quietly. "Bracciano was built by the Orsini family in fifteen hundred and something. I am not sure about the precise year."

"Well, then, a fifteenth-century castle. It's very much the same sort of thing, you know," said Lalli, looking at Mr. Floyd with unruffled equanimity. "I know the place very well. I have often ridden out there. I have relatives who live in the town. There is the lake, too ; the lake is worth seeing ; and the country is pleasant now that spring has come." He looked at Barbara. "I am sure you would enjoy it."

“Perhaps—I think I should,” the girl said a little shyly.

Ordinarily she found very little difficulty in talking to her father’s visitors, or at least in listening to their talk with evident signs of interest. She was quite well aware now that her father was regarding her with an expression which implied disapproval of her constrained manner, when he said :

“Barbara, will you kindly ring the bell? Margherita has brought no wine.”

This reproof of her inattention to the wants of her guest did not prevent a sense of relief in the excuse it furnished for getting up and moving across the room; although the next instant the change of position brought its own rush of intense self-consciousness.

She gave her orders briefly to the servant, but she did not immediately return to her old place. She walked over to the writing-table and altered the position of some papers. The sense of the tacit understanding between herself and this stranger was like something in the air. It was all the more oppressive for its indefiniteness. It had been forced upon her. It was intolerable. She bent down lower over the papers, and there was a quick indignant look of resentment in her eyes, which boded no especial good to Lalli.

“The chief, I might almost say the only difficulty would lie in the distance ; in the distance from Rome, you know,” she could hear her father saying ; and a child might have seen how his disapproval of his

daughter's conduct was beginning to influence him favourably towards the innocent victim of such inhospitality.

"The distance is not more than twenty miles well, a long twenty miles," the young man argued rather eagerly; "we could easily go there and get back in the day. If staying there overnight is out of the question——"

"Quite out of the question"

"Oh, but there is nothing simpler than coming back. We are not in winter now, *che diavolo!* The days are growing long. Look here, Mr. Floyd; say we start in the morning. We are off by eight o'clock. Say it takes us two hours and a half to get there——"

"It will be nearer four."

“Well, say three hours—three hours and a half,” said this obliging young man—“we are there by eleven or twelve o’clock at latest. We lunch at my aunt’s house—we lunch at the inn if you prefer it—we see all the castle ; by five o’clock the horses are rested and we are ready to start back for Rome. And you have seen something stupendous—out of the way. I am sure you would like it,” he said, turning suddenly to Barbara.

She had been listening with brightening eyes ; but now, at this unexpected appeal, she turned away and began busying herself with the wine-glasses.

“If papa chooses to go, I daresay it will be interesting,” she said, beginning to pour something rather recklessly out of a decanter.

Lalli rose at once, and politely relieved her of the burden.

“Shall I offer you some of your own wine, Mr. Floyd?” he asked gaily. He was placing himself quite on the footing of an old *habitué* of the house. But there was surely a certain restlessness in his glance which kept continually seeking Barbara's. Her face had grown a little pale; she never looked at him. It was curious how little this seemed to affect his cheerfulness.

“By-the-way, Mr. Floyd, you who are interested in painting, you should see the collection of portraits there, at Bracciano—family portraits. And in the great hall there are frescoes—something wonderful—by—I forget the man's name. Zu—Zu—Zucchetti?”

“By Zuccherò, perhaps?” said Mr. Floyd, with a sudden gleam of interest. “I have an old woodcut of one of them. Very poor work — atrocious; but interesting as being a fine example of the groping of a man’s mind when—— Wait. You know the originals?”

“Oh, I saw them the last time I went over the castle with my cousin,” said the young man carelessly, holding up his wine-glass against the light.

“I can show you the cut I speak of, if you will excuse me a moment,” said Mr. Floyd, rising briskly from his chair.

He closed the door inadvertently behind him.

For a moment there was not a word exchanged between the two young people

he had left together. Then Lalli put down his glass and leaned forward and spoke.

“Will you tell me what I have done to make you angry with me?” he said gently. His voice had altogether changed from the formal tone in which from time to time he had addressed her in her father’s presence.

She was quick to feel the significance of this transformation. The colour sprang to her cheeks resentfully. Her voice was trembling a little, as with suppressed anger, as she said :

“I wish to tell you—I wished to meet you to tell you of it—I will not be spoken to as if—— I mean—— You have nothing to say to me which you cannot say before papa,” she concluded, irrelevantly.

Lalli did not answer for a moment. He

was puzzled. He could see that something had gone wrong, but it never occurred to him—his mind glancing far and wide for an explanation—the idea never suggested itself to him that an outraged sense of probity could have anything to do with this inexplicable emotion. For an instant he even thought of asking if there had been anything in his manner calculated to arouse Mr. Floyd's suspicions ; but, on consideration, this did not seem probable ; “I am not a schoolboy to betray myself,” he reflected quickly. He fixed his dark imperious eyes more entreatingly upon her.

“Will you not tell me what I have done to make you angry ?” he repeated gently.

He spoke in the tone he would have used in speaking to a frightened child. She had

taken up a paper-cutter from the table and was playing with it nervously, but he could see that her fingers were trembling. Perhaps he was inclined to interpret this agitation as something favourable to himself.

“I did not think you would be vexed with me for coming so soon,” he said tentatively. “I thought that after what I told you last night——”

Her fingers suddenly tightened their grasp upon the toy dagger she was holding, and her lips parted, but she said nothing.

“Perhaps I made a mistake in coming at all?”

Still she said nothing.

He looked at her, and for an instant a keen and cruel light, a light as keen as the flash of a sword-blade, gleamed in his bold

and arrogant eyes, but he said humbly enough :

“ It was the first thing I thought of this morning. It came to me when I woke. I knew that there was some good thing had come to me, and then I remembered our agreement of last night.”

She flushed and let the paper-knife fall to the ground and sat up straight in her chair.

“ But, Count Lalli——” she began in a low voice.

He gave her no time to continue.

“ Do you know that I have been out on the Campagna since before daybreak ? I slept for half an hour, while they were saddling my horse. I had to ride all over the *tenuta* to give my men some orders about—oh, about the draining and that sort of thing.

You would not understand it, and it is a wonder how they managed to understand it, poor devils, for do you know what I was thinking of out there? I thought that perhaps fate had grown weary of persecuting me. I said to Destiny: 'Do what you like now, for as for me, I have got a—a new friend.' ”

He hesitated and shot a rapid glance at her flushed and troubled face.

“You should have seen the way old Gian Battista stared at me,” he said. “Gian Battista, the old *fattore*, who was already overseer of the farm in my father's time. I had him up and out before daylight, and if you could have seen his expression when he heard that I meant to be back in Rome this afternoon !”

He took up her glove, which was lying on the table, and looked at it, and laid it down again: "I have thought of nothing else since last night, of nothing but of coming and seeing you again," he said vehemently, and if the assertion was rather a rash one that is not to be wondered at. It was literally the first time in his life that he had ever been left, alone, in an authorised *tête-à-tête* with a young girl.

She threw back her head a little at that and looked him squarely in the face.

"Surely your own judgment should prevent you from saying such things to me, Count Lalli," she said, rather proudly. "We are strangers to each other. Why do you try"—she hesitated for a second or two, and then went on bravely, but the

colour was burning on her cheek—"why do you try to make me feel as if there were some—some secret understanding between us? I do not know you. I—I do not understand——"

To her inexpressible confusion and bewilderment her eyes filled suddenly with tears. She sprang up hastily and walked over to the nearest window. In her intense desire to conceal this humiliating weakness, she quite forgot the importance she had attached to this explanation. "Papa seems to be a long time in finding that print. I wonder if it is mislaid? or if I should go and help him look for it?" she said, with an attempt at speaking quite carelessly.

Lalli had thrown himself back in his chair and was looking earnestly at the contents of

his wine-glass. His quick ear had caught the sound of the distant closing of a door.

“This is excellent Velletri of yours, Mr. Floyd,” he said almost immediately, rising to receive the old-fashioned woodcut which was offered to him, and pretending to examine it with much interest and attention; “but I think I could give you the address of a wine-shop where you would get some red wine that would astonish you. It comes to Rome in sealed barrels. I know the man at whose *vigna* it is made. And it is a pagan wine, too, for it has never been baptized at the city gates. I will give you the address.”

“Oh, you are very kind. But we don’t drink much wine here,” Mr. Floyd said, taking back his discoloured print and look-

ing fondly at it ; “I seldom care for it myself, and my daughter—my daughter prefers white wine to this, I believe.”

“Foreign wine, perhaps ? Some people are very fond of the Rhine wines. I don’t care for them myself, but perhaps you like the Rhine wine better, signorina ?”

There did not seem, to Mr. Floyd at least, to be anything offensive in this simple question. Indeed, it was uttered with quite a marked expression of formality and respect ; but Barbara seemed scarcely grateful to her guest for this polite attempt to include her in the general conversation. She was still seated by the farther window, her eyes were downcast, she was looking pale.

“On the whole, I think then we may as well go to-morrow. The weather seems

settled, and the day in the country will do my daughter good after the fatigue of her first ball," she heard her father say. She understood the implied explanation of her own lack of cordiality. She gave Count Lalli her hand, when he approached her to say good-bye, with an air of quiet and proud negation. At that moment the chief impression connected with him in her mind was a fervent wish not to meet him, not to be with him again.

She rose as soon as he had left the room, and began putting her gloves and one or two things together.

"We shall start at seven o'clock; you had better tell Margherita," her father said presently, adjusting his woodcut carefully in its place in a somewhat dusty portfolio.

“Very well, papa.”

“You do not seem pleased,” he said rather impatiently; “I thought you were always so pleased at the prospect of a day in the country? However, you have yourself to thank if this does not satisfy you. I suppose that is a friend of Octave Damon’s—that rather stupid young man?”

“Octave introduced him to me,” said Barbara slowly. In spite of that instinctive scorn of all the minor forms of deception, which from time to time had shocked Mrs. Damon into a regretful conviction of Barbara’s unconventionality, it cost her a distinct effort now to add: “I—I am not sure that I like Count Lalli, papa. I do not like his manner. I think he——”

The remembrance of the tone in which he

had said, "I have thought of nothing but seeing you again," silenced her by its cutting suggestion of ingratitude. Her eager prefiguring imagination seized upon the fact of his disappointment in her ; she seemed in some measure to become responsible for his embittered way of envisaging daily life. To her generous and sympathetic nature any urgent appeal came with the force of a moral claim. She hesitated, and looked down, and was silent.

"Well," said Mr. Floyd, tying the last string of his portfolio, "I saw nothing amiss in his manner myself. You cannot expect an Italian to talk to you as an Englishman or an American would. It is not the custom of the country. This young man has not probably met many strangers. You must

remember that he thinks he is paying you a compliment by treating you with great formality." He got up from his chair and put his portfolio under his arm. "I should be pleased to see you a little more cordial in your manner to-morrow, Barbara. For the time being, I consider this young man as our guest."

"But, papa——" the girl began desperately.

And then Margherita came in and began making a disturbance among the decanters and glasses.

"And if you please, sir, the man has been again about those frames," she said, pausing in front of Mr. Floyd as she was carrying out the tray.

"The deuce he has!" he said, opening

the door hurriedly. "Where have they been put then? Where have you put them?"

"Oh," said the old woman comfortably, "he said, 'Tell your master,' said he, 'that one of my men has been ill; and one has won a prize in the lottery; and last week'—there were two *festas* last week—— Eh, Miss Barbara, but the *signor padre* is in a fine temper this afternoon; *Madonna mia!* but it is true that that frame-maker is a liar, poor man. *Come si fa?* Poor people must live, and have their little bit of pleasure."

She set the tray down on the table in an incidental manner, and crossed her arms thoughtfully.

"It is a pity we took the trouble to go

there this morning, Miss Barbara. They say it brings evil fortune to have been so near a dying person. The porter has just come up and told me of it; the pizzicaruolo's wife is dead."

The girl started, and looked up.

"Dead !"

"Ah," said Margherita regretfully, "they say it always brings evil fortune." She considered a moment. "But I shall play the number of her bed in the lottery," she added more cheerfully.

Barbara looked at her and said nothing.

She went to her own room and shut herself in. She sat down on a low chair by the side of the bed and looked at the ground. She had still her hat on as she had come in from her walk ; her attitude was one of

weariness and discouragement. She seemed to have lived so much within the last few hours. The livid, commonplace countenance of the woman in her hospital-bed seemed only a sign, an expression, of all the unnoted sorrow of the world. She turned with a half-sob from this image to every thought of tenderness and warm human kindness. The remembrance of Lalli's gentleness and care of her touched her with an exquisite pain. She put up her hand to her lips with a movement which was habitual to her. "If one could only feel safe from the necessity of giving pain."

She had been sitting so for some minutes before her attention was aroused by a small continuous tapping at her window ; her eyes turned mechanically in the direction of this

sound ; some tame pigeons were strutting up and down the outer ledge, waiting for their accustomed food. She rose languidly enough to get it for them. She stood leaning against the open casement looking idly out. One of the pigeons was eating greedily, the other was more watchful, taking its food in sudden rushes, observing her movements warily with round and shining eyes. It was curious in after years how vividly she recollected that moment—its absolute stillness ; the look of the convent roof against the quiet blue of the afternoon sky ; the softness of the spring wind in her face ; the restless rustling and cooing of the doves. She looked back to it with a curious, a melancholy interest—as a man who has narrowly escaped death by shipwreck might remember

his first slight, half-careless uneasiness at sea.

To dream of noble possibilities, to awaken in the tightening mesh of petty and inescapable circumstance—surely this is no such new experience? And hers was no uncommon destiny. It was but one of countless other existences—a life ardent in desire, enthusiastic in purpose, but insignificant in result and full of extreme sadness. But it had a purpose. And circumstance is an inexorable god. Surely it is well with us if even—if only—in supreme moments of emotion, we are yet capable of attaining to motives of action too high for reach from flat and common paths of life.

CHAPTER V.

COUNT CESCO LALLI had been making his reflections. As he sat in his accustomed place at the Valle Theatre that night his attention was sorely wandering. He was looking, it is true, at the stage, where for the fourteenth time in five weeks they were playing the "Belle Helene" of Offenbach, but what little he heard of the dialogue served merely to suggest long rambling trains of reminiscence. His past life came back to him in vivid detached fragments, as life often comes on the eve of some moral crisis. Some actor spoke of a school—he saw him-

self again a lad in the military college. He remembered the long damp corridors, the crowded class-rooms, the vast empty court with its rows of leafless trees — hacked, stripped, denuded by countless restless hands ; he thought, for the first time for years, of the high stone gates, the walls that had shut in so many years of his boyhood. He remembered the thin severe face of the officiating priest on the first occasion he had been selected to serve at mass ; he remembered his own confusion over the responses, the half-curious half-defiant feeling with which he had knelt in full view of all his familiar comrades ; he had forgotten a hundred other things, and the look of that priest's face and the smell of that incense were still vivid. He remembered twenty

different schoolboy pranks, old escapades, quarrels, a crowd of forgotten faces; the face of his greatest ally;—he had married since; he had passed captain; he was shot at Solferino;—Marcantonio Borgia's face while they were still boys together. He turned and stared at his companion.

“That little Teresina is not a bad little actress, *che diavolo!* not a bad little actress. But there is nothing like a ballet, after all,” said Borgia complacently, putting up two yellow fingers to smooth his moustache.

Lalli burst out laughing. “If old Padre Giacomo could hear you!” he said.

“What! old Padre Giacomo the Jesuit? The old boy we used to confess to at the Academy?” Borgia asked, opening his eyes wider.

Lalli did not answer. Old Padre Giacomo ! Ah, they had been afraid of him once ! He remembered later days—old holidays down in the country, old visits to Bracciano. Then manhood. The day when the great gates opened. His first uniform ; his horse ; the click of the spurs, the rattle of the sword when he entered a café and the girl behind the counter turned to look at him ; the life with the regiment ; his first love ; his first duel—how far off it all seemed ! He was only thirty now. He stared hard at the stage. What a life it had been ! and lately what a blank ! He thought of himself, the dashing cavalry officer of two years before, and now—— His thoughts turned suddenly to Barbara, and he smiled. He rose when the others did ; he too lounged back

against the opposite stall, and stroked his moustache and surveyed the boxes between the acts with a disdainful and critical air. But it was noticeable that at intervals that same indefinable smile crossed his lips, and his dark and arrogant eyes glittered at moments with an indescribable assurance of dominion and victory.

But it was not in this mood the next morning that he approached Barbara. She was alone for the moment, but it was with a great show of gentleness and self-restraint that he wished her good morning. He apologised for the liberty he had taken in appearing before her in his rough shooting-dress. He did not offer to shake hands.

"I have been thinking about — about yesterday," he said in a low voice. He

could see without looking that her face was more than usually serious and constrained. "I have been thinking that you were right in saying that you did not know me. Sometime when you do know me, perhaps you will give me some other flowers to take the place of—this."

He drew out an elaborate card-case, emblazoned with his arms and monogram, and opened it. There was a bunch of withered violets in an inner pocket. He laid them on the table.

"Sometime, when you know me better," he said.

He stepped back and stood before her—a tall soldierly figure in dark green. He had on high top-boots, which reached to his knee; he held a light fowling-piece in one

hand, and there was a feather in his hat. At another time Barbara might have been amused at the somewhat theatrical completeness of this costume ; but now she hardly looked at him.

“You are very good to me,” she said shyly. She took the flowers from the table and threw them rather hastily into a drawer. Her fingers were trembling a little.

“And now I am forgiven and we are really friends,” said Lalli watching her. The colour rushed to her pale cheeks, but she smiled too in a pleased sort of way, and she lifted her clear candid eyes up to his.

“Yes, really friends,” she said. She stood silent, fingering the books upon the table for a moment, and then—perhaps

a recollection of her father's hospitable maxims came back to her : " You have had no breakfast. Very well, then. But at any rate I must give you a cup of tea," she said.

She walked over to the small and dainty table, and he followed her.

" There is a chair, and will you have tea or coffee ? " she asked gravely.

" Coffee, please."

He watched her white hands busying themselves about his cup with a perfectly new sensation of amusement and pleasure. There was something infinitely attractive and fascinating to the Italian in this touch of careless familiarity. He glanced about the large low-ceilinged room with a feeling of being at home, an impulse of liking

which extended even to the heavy old-fashioned chairs and Barbara's bowls of flowers on the tables.

"You don't have anything yourself," he said, looking at her. She was standing opposite him buttoning her gloves. Her eyes were downcast.

"I have had my breakfast," she said quickly.

Margherita came in ; her arms were full of wraps. The girl turned to her hastily. She felt very happy, but she was embarrassed as well. She insisted upon loading herself with more cloaks than she could carry ; she protested that there was no weight to speak of ; but when Lalli took half of them away from her again she made no objection. She stood patiently and let him arrange them as

he pleased. She looked up into his face again as he bent over her while she thanked him, and they smiled at each other with a quick simultaneous sense of pleasure in—in what ?

“It will be a delicious day for the country,” Barbara said confidently, looking back and nodding emphatically at the two men following her down the palace stair.

It was not yet seven o'clock. The shops were still closed ; the shutters barred in all the houses. The few foot passengers they passed stopped short to stare at the smiling faces of this holiday party. The horses rattled their bells and shook the gaudy trappings of their harness ; the driver straightened himself up and waved his whip with an air of importance as he answered

“*Bracciano!*” to the question of the custom-house soldiers lounging about in the early sunshine at the city gate.

It was a clear cool morning ; the sky was still pale and colourless. The carriage-wheels made fresh tracks in the light dust which lay over the road ; from time to time a bird flew out of the bare budding hedges ; the grass was drenched with dew, and the sun was still red upon the hills and tree tops. They tramped with a steady swinging trot up the short stony incline of the Ponte Molle ; the calm, broad surface of the Tiber was gleaming in long, silvery streaks ; a breath of wind blew over them from the shadowy water, the sun had not yet warmed those brown and heavy banks.

Perhaps of all the many Campagna ways

that road to Bracciano is most desolate. For miles they drove through utter solitude. The great city behind them sank lower between the grassy foldings of the hills; the gray dome of St. Peter's glittered for an instant in the early morning sunlight, and Rome had faded away like some strange vision of heavy silent walls. They were driving across old battlefields, and the confident little daisies were lifting up a million fresh, round, dew-washed faces to the sun. They passed the burial-place of cities, whose very names strike thinly on the ear, like hollow wandering ghosts; but it was only to hear the voice of unseen larks calling through the stillness like the voice of the delicate-footed spring, wakening with sweet insistence the melancholy plain.

They talked and laughed lightly enough as they drove along in the pleasant morning freshness, and the horses rattled their bells, and the sun grew warm upon their faces, but the silence of the Campagna never changed. The wheels rattled over the rough pavement of La Storta; a man was standing in the doorway of the old posting inn; a dog barked after them as they passed, and some fever-stricken children raised a shrill and ineffectual shout. The road turned to the left, the houses vanished, the feeble flicker of human life was gone, blotted out of remembrance by the vast majesty of this immemorial calm. Mid-sea is not more lonely, or more inexorable; the tossing waves of the Atlantic have known no wilder storms than the fierce flood of conquest

which broke and raged and passed away among these peaceful hills. And now, when the larks are singing, the silence there is like the silence of death ; the great grassy hillsides lie bare to the tranquil sky, but the sunlight shining on them is as the sunlight on a grave.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before, the road rising a little, they saw a narrow silvery line beyond a row of trees.

"Ah, there is the lake !" said Lalli, rising suddenly to his feet. He steadied himself with one hand on the box, while he pointed out to her the different houses of Bracciano.

"My aunt is expecting our visit ; I wrote to them yesterday," he said, as they entered the shadow of a narrow street. He looked about him with an air of amused recogni-

tion, and nodded good-humouredly to a group of men sitting on chairs before the café door. "I was stationed here once with a company of Zouaves."

"I suppose you found it dull. I observe that Italians in general avoid the country," said Mr. Floyd, looking eagerly up the street past the yellow lichen-covered roofs to where he could catch a glimpse of high gray castle walls.

"Oh," said Lalli, glancing imperceptibly at Barbara, "I amused myself."

He led the way into a narrow house and up some old winding stairs. A feeling of damp fell on them from the bare stone walls; their voices sounded hollow. They had to grope their way in the dark after the first turning.

“Give me your hand ; I know the way,” said Lalli pausing.

He rang a bell sharply. The feeble tinkle died away ; then came a sound of listless footsteps, and then a door opened in the darkness, and a girl’s voice asked :

“ Who is it ? ”

Lalli dropped Barbara’s fingers.

“It is I, Cesco, with my friends. Did you not know I was coming ? Did you not get my letter ? ”

There was the rustle of a dress ; Barbara was near enough to hear the sound of a quick catching of the breath on the part of some unseen person.

“Perhaps, if they do not expect us, papa, we had better not go in,” she said in a low tone, and in English.

"It's only my cousin," said Lalli hastily, and at the same moment the voice which had spoken before added :

"Come in, Cesco."

They followed the young girl into a large light room, where other people were seated.

"This is my cousin, Regina," Lalli said.

The young girl fixed her magnificent eyes upon Barbara and said nothing. She went and stood beside the window, where the light fell full upon her heavy disordered hair. She was dressed in a sort of loose faded *peignoir*, dragged open at the throat. Her skin was of the warm golden tint of old marble. Her forehead was low and square with thin arched eyebrows, her red disdainful lips were severely beautiful, like the

mouth of a Greek goddess—but of a living goddess.

Barbara turned involuntarily to look at Lalli. He was speaking to his aunt ; the other lady was introduced, and seats were found and explanations were exchanged about the missing letter.

“The signorina speaks Italian ? Ah, I hear. My nephew tells me he has brought you to look at our castello,” the elder lady said.

There was a highly-coloured row of lithographs—the wars of Napoleon—hanging up near the ceiling around two sides of the room. The chairs were ranged neatly back against the walls. There was a vase of artificial flowers on either end of the chimney-piece, and a clock which ticked

audibly in the pauses between Barbara's remarks.

“ *Già*. You have come to see our castle. *Già*; I understand;” the Contessa Lalli repeated thoughtfully.

The clock measured out the moments; a cock crowed shrilly far down the village street. Cesco Lalli was explaining again the mistake of the postman. He gesticulated more, and his voice was louder than it had been in speaking to them at home.

“My daughter, Regina, is gone to get you some cake and wine. You must take something before you go up to see our castle,” the contessa said impressively.

Barbara glanced anxiously at her father; they had often laughed at these formal visits in Italian houses, but when had she ever felt

this apologetic uneasiness—this desire to account for, and conceal, deficiencies, before ?

Regina returned. She had changed her dress in the interval ; her superb hair was smoothed and rolled over cushions which doubled the size of her head. She was dressed in some woollen stuff of a bright hard blue, with very white cuffs, which were pulled down to cover half her hand ; she had put on a chain and locket, which rattled against her stiff open collar when she turned her head. And with all that she was superbly beautiful. She came in carrying a small round tray in her hand ; she presented the cake and wine to Mr. Floyd without a smile, with the air of a captive princess.

“Let me take that for you,” said Lalli rising, and coming behind her.

She took no notice of his presence ; she made no answer. Her delicate nostrils quivered for an instant, and she half shut her eyes involuntarily. That was all. Mr. Floyd, who was helping himself to cake, saw absolutely nothing.

“ Let me take that tray, Gina.”

“ Let me pass,” she said in a very low voice. Her mother and aunt were watching her, and she smiled as she said it. She lifted her shining eyes to his for an instant still smiling——

“ Ah !” said Lalli, involuntarily stepping back. Not all the novels of Paul de Kock could prevent that instinctive movement of his hand to cross himself.

“ *Regina mia*, the signorina will have some more wine,” the old contessa said. She

leaned forward and smoothed her daughter's dress complacently. "What were you doing in your room, *figlia mia*? Why did you go back there? Your aunt heard you going up the stairs a second time," she asked in a low voice.

"I went back—to light the candles before the Madonna," the girl said dutifully.

"*Bene*, that will be in honour of your visit, Miss—Miss Floyd. She is such a child yet," the mother said looking tenderly after her. "I like to know what she does. It is not so with you foreign ladies, who are all so reasonable, and so—so emancipated."

"Why not?" said Barbara absently, looking over at Mr. Floyd, and then she started and sat up straighter and blushed a little at her own inattention. "I mean of course not.

People are brought up very differently," she said in her clear candid voice, turning her head to look at the contessa.

The Signora Lalli did not seem surprised by this incoherence; conversation implying any continuous line of ideas would by the very nature of things have ceased to be a pleasure, and this was essentially a visit of pleasure, and curiosity. "Naturally you will never see her again. Still, you had better talk to that young lady while you are showing her the castle, Regina," the mother said when her guests had taken their departure. "She comes from outside, *da fuori*, she will know the fashions."

"I thought Cesco seemed very attentive," suggested the aunt, straightening the photo-

graph-album upon the table. There were other books there as well—a prayer-book with a gilt cross on the cover, and Regina's name on the title-page ; there was also a much-worn copy of the Book of Dreams—for finding lucky numbers in the lottery. Between two of the leaves there was a sonnet printed on rose-coloured paper; it was addressed : “To my Illustrious Friend and Fellow Citizen, the noble Pietro Cesare Lalli, on the Auspicious Occasion of his Recovery from an attack of acute Bronchitis which threatened to End his Days.” The words “Pietro Cesare Lalli” and “his Recovery” were printed in different coloured inks.

“Those foreigners are always rich,” the contessa said thoughtfully.

“Probably she is Protestant.”

“They seldom have any religion,” said Madame Lalli calmly. She had been as far as Milan on her wedding-tour, and her sister-in-law seldom contradicted her on any but household matters.

Apparently there were no such serious considerations to disturb the harmony of the little party wandering out there in the sunlight. They had stopped at the small inn to order their luncheon. Barbara looked rather anxiously at her father as they lounged about the courtyard, waiting for Lalli to rejoin them.

“I hope that you were not too much bored, papa? They—well, perhaps they are not very intellectual people, and all that, but they seemed very kind and anxious to please us,” she said.

“My dear child, you are growing very exacting. That girl was charming ; I don’t know when I have seen such magnificent eyes. Ah, here comes our friend. Luncheon is ordered, is it ? And now for a preliminary look at the castle,” said Mr. Floyd briskly, striking the stones with his stick.

And now everything they looked at seemed to have the power of communicating some new pleasure to the girl. She called their attention to a hundred different chance effects of light and shade and colour. She looked at the narrow picturesque ways, at the quaint outer stairs to many of the houses, at the steep tiled roofs with a sincere and evident delight. Perhaps there was something a trifle abnormal in such enthusiasm. Those old yellow lichen-covered

walls had seldom been looked at with such caressing admiration before. And even at the rough little inn everything seemed to have conspired to give Barbara pleasure. She made friends with the landlady on the spot. She fed all the dogs who followed them gravely up the narrow stair. If the table had to be spread in an upper bedroom, to escape the intolerable noise of a band of festive carriers, at least the handful of spring flowers she had gathered in their hasty walk sufficed to give it an air of grace and home comfort. Mr. Floyd was very much amused by the exhibition of his daughter's evident wonderment and satisfaction, but even he had to admit that the thing had been well managed when their hostess placed on the table a tall tapering bottle of Rhenish wine.

"I knew that you preferred it, and—and it is very good of you not to mind roughing it a little," the young man said rather hastily. It was well worth having taken a little trouble to be looked at with such pleased and friendly eyes.

When at last they did go up to the castle, there was a fine breeze blowing the clouds about across the deep blue of the sky. The lake was rippling in the sunlight. From the castle terrace they could hear the faint lapping of the water against the old gray stones. Regina joined them at the archway. She would make no response to any of Barbara's advances; indeed she hardly spoke. She followed them silently up the paved causeway, through time-stained passages cut in the solid rock.

“It is strange,” Mr. Floyd said seriously, leaning upon his stick and gazing earnestly about him as they entered the inner courtyard, “at that first entrance the architecture seemed purely mediæval—quite unaffected by any local influence. One might have believed oneself in any old Scotch castle. Here, on the contrary—look at that loggia, Barbara—the spirit of the place is strictly Italian—a fine example of fifteenth-century gothic, very fine.”

“Did you notice that too, papa? All that outer entrance is like one of Sir Walter Scott’s novels,” said Barbara eagerly.

Regina Lalli looked at her with an expression of undisguised contempt.

They explored long suites of bare half-furnished rooms; at every step the old

severe-visaged housekeeper unbarred some heavy shutter; the light streamed in on high bare walls, on blackened pictures, gaunt empty carved oak bedsteads, and rows upon rows of white-shrouded chairs. Here and there a mediocre family portrait, in eighteenth-century costume, looked down with faded eyes upon them; at every window-seat cut in the thick old walls they lingered to look out over the sunny breezy expanse of the lake. Once, as Barbara passed with her quick light step from one of these window-niches to the next, she came rather unexpectedly upon Lalli and his cousin. He turned about hastily.

“You who have read so much, you should know the legend about the lake there,” he

said. "I was telling it to my cousin. There was another town here in old Roman times, Sabate, and the lake has covered it over. Only the fishermen say that on a clear day, as you sail across the water, you can look down to the bottom and see the old towers still standing." He shrugged his shoulders. "It is a fable, *si capisce*."

"I believe it," said Barbara smiling. She turned to Regina; "and you?"

"I don't know," the girl said sulkily enough.

They went down again to the terrace; they strolled together down the hill, between the hedges along the quiet country road. Behind them the grim old castle towered heavily against the changing sky. The

ground beneath their feet was soft from recent rainfalls. Seen from this height the foldings of the Campagna were green with the short new grass. In this sheltered lane, away from the wind, the air was warmer. The shifting clouds floated whitely by, trailing soft shadows over lake and road. The tepid afternoon was full of a sense of the sweet irresponsibility of the spring; the full red tree-buds glistened everywhere in the sun, and Barbara was constantly stopping to fill her hands with frail star-like blossoms clustering thickly about the wayward thorny hedges, which will not wait for leaves. Once, as she stopped to pass her fingers lovingly over some small yellowish folded ferns, Regina fixed her sombre gaze upon her cousin.

“Are you going to marry—that girl?” she asked imperiously.

He made no answer. He stood with his arms folded, looking at the ground.

“Listen!” said Barbara, calling to them softly. She lifted her hand, and a smile passed like a gleam of light over her sensitive face, as from across the lake on the farther shore, from out the gray stone mass of an antique convent church there floated a faint and fibreless sound of vesper-bells.

The shadow of the castle was deepening over the village street as their carriage rolled sharply over the stones. Before long, night had fallen. Looking back, the pale gold of the sunset had faded to a single silvery streak; a lonely ruined watch-tower

rose in blackest silhouette against the clearness ; before them they could just distinguish the paler outline of the road.

At that moment, in the town they had left behind them, a girl was crouching upon the floor in her own room before a painted image of the Madonna. She had been weeping passionately ; possessed, shaken, mastered by gusts of fierce resentment—a burning sense of impotent despair. In a moment of wilder desolation she had raised herself up suddenly and blown out the lighted candles of the shrine. Now, as she lay there moaning helplessly, her grief had assumed the form of an unreasoning terror at this horrible darkness which seemed the visible sign of all the ruined blackness of her life. The conviction that Cesco no

longer cared for her returned with intolerable keenness. Her mother's room door stood ajar. She pressed her head hard against the bed-clothes to deaden the sound of her sobbing. She was delivered over to the passionate wordless vehemence of her anguish, like some dumb creature stricken in the dark, enduring suffering for which it sees no cause.

Out there, on the Campagna, it was still light enough for the travellers to distinguish the pale outline of each other's faces. The horses were moving more slowly; from time to time the driver whistled and spoke to them in the silence. Mr. Floyd had wrapped himself in his cloak, and leaned back in the corner of the carriage. At first Barbara thought he was asleep, then she heard him

sigh. Heaven knows what old, old memories had been evoked by the charm of this soft, transparent night. She laid her hand rather timidly upon her father's. He did not reject it, and there was something in the unusual tenderness of the action which touched the girl in a quite indescribable way. She, too, leaned back, and was silent. It was a shadowless, moonless night. She looked up at the pale luminous sky above her; the air grew damper, and there was a sound of running water; they climbed a hill, and the wind blew keen and fresh.

“You are not cold?” said Lalli, bending solicitously near.

“No.”

She could think of him better if he did not speak. Again they passed the houses of La

Storta. A solitary light was burning in an upper window. A dog rushed out at them ; they could hear him barking far down the road ; the sound grew faint and fainter, and died presently away. There was nothing now to jar upon this perfect silence ; nothing to check their onward moving, farther and farther, along the unseen road.

CHAPTER VI.

It was with a distinct sense of annoyance—a feeling of having been forestalled, that Lexeter listened to an account of this Bracciano expedition. He heard of it first at the Floyds' house one afternoon when he was calling; it had become a habit with him to go there of late, and yet Lexeter was a man who lived very much by himself. He was at once irascible and sensitive; he had all the temperament of a poet—a poet of meditation and sentiment, without the gift of expression. He was ambitious, and in his youth he had suffered from a degree

of poverty which his pride had rendered intolerable. He had acquired a habit of sufficing to himself, but it was only a habit ; it was something argued out—the result of deliberate conviction. Walter Hardinge, with all his frank careless manner, his ready friendliness, his apparent impressionability, was gifted in reality with a hundred times more self-reliance, more power of will than this other man so much his senior in years and in experience. To one of them the world was a thing to be denied, derided, and never quite forgotten, and passionately desired. To the other it was the most natural, the most enjoyable, the most subordinate of possessions. Hardinge's imagination was never troubled beyond the pitch of delight ; he was born for success, for

vivid sympathies, for clear beliefs and definite confidence of action. One of them could see distinctly what the other believed. One contemplated life, the other thought about living. Perhaps it was this which had made them friends in the first place; but there was a fascination about Hardinge, about his young enjoyment of all the worn old detail of existence, which was quite irresistible. His mind was ardent, courageous, objective. He had the rarest, the most attractive of qualities—he was alive, keenly alive, and he was satisfied.

But Lexeter was not easily satisfied. It would perhaps have been difficult for him to have explained, even to himself, the attraction he found in the long hours he spent in the Floyds' apartment, smoking reflectively,

or discussing old books with Mr. Floyd, and varying editions. He was an indefatigable book collector.

“It is the brutal good sense of my own contributions to the British newspaper which has driven me to this,” he said to Barbara on one occasion. He had a small parchment-covered volume in his hand, which he had bought on his way to the house. “This quaint complacent elaboration of trivial learning gratifies my sense of the eternal equilibrium of things. I even begin to believe my own leading articles may be forgotten—in time.” He turned over a few of the brown discoloured pages. “I like the thin, remote, high-bred latinity of these sonnets. They are so bad, so delightfully, execrably bad in style — and so useless.

They are the merest ghosts of spent and artificial force."

"Do you know at one time I believed that all the men who wrote for newspapers were such wise people, with such well-disciplined minds," said Barbara smiling, and lifting up her eyes from her work.

It always gave him pleasure when she looked at him. Sometimes he did not speak to her twice in the course of an afternoon. She went in and out of the room, busied about a hundred different trifles. Sometimes she asked his advice about reading. Once she had even told him something about her visit to the hospital. Of late she had grown more silent; she would sit for hours by the high old-fashioned window, apparently absorbed in her work. The

light streamed in upon her pale round cheek, upon her white moving fingers, upon her soft ash-coloured hair ; from time to time she would look up or speak to her father, and what a frankness, what a sense of security there was in that look ! Mr. Floyd himself was slightly puzzled by this sudden abstraction and quiescence in Barbara, but it was quite in keeping with her sensitive impressionable nature that some chance word of his own had effected this change. From whatever cause it came, it pleased him. It separated her personality from the remembered insistent image of her mother ; he spoke to her with far more freedom than was his wont. In after days Barbara often remembered those peaceful afternoons of spring. The weather had

broken on the very night of their return ; a week of rain had set in—of soft sirocco rain and luminous gray skies. Sometimes from her seat by the window she could see deep drifts of storm-darkened clouds blow blackly in from the Campagna.

“It will soon rain,” she would say, her clear young voice breaking in upon their never-ending argument ; and then perhaps Lexeter would stroll over to the window, and together, and with something of the same secret thrill of exultation, they would listen to the wild rush of the hail on the casement and watch the reluctant swaying of the cypress-trees, defiant, if wind-shaken, against the livid sky.

In the lulls of the tempest Lexeter would look slowly and scrutinisingly about the

room. There was not a detail in it with which he was not familiar, or which he would have changed. It was rather an ugly room, large and low-ceilinged, with faded gilding on the heavy cornices and faded crimson hangings. He had seen very different interiors in his London experience, but there was something about this which suited him. He liked the large shabby seats. There was a sofa in one corner on which no one ever sat, and a carved chair whose arm dropped off when one moved it abruptly. He liked these details ; it seemed to him characteristically southern. He took pleasure in them as he took pleasure in watching Barbara move carelessly about the room, putting away her books, or passing her finger-tips caressingly over her flowers.

Very often he did not speak to her for hours, and yet nothing could have deepened his conviction of the nobility and simplicity of her nature—and its goodness. Once, when she was consulting him about some book, he looked at her in such a way that she paused astonished.

“I do not believe that you have heard a word of what I was saying, Mr. Lexeter.”

“Not much, perhaps,” he said, smiling a little; “but I like to hear you speak.”

He took the volume from her hand, and glanced at it, and laid it on the table.

“I wish you would go on with that sewing stuff,” he said discontentedly. “Let those books alone. Your work-basket humanises the room.”

She took up her work obediently and

without an answer. She treated him with something of the affectionate trust she showed her father. The constant companionship of a man nearer her own age might have troubled her; between these two she felt so confident, so safe. Lalli had called more than once during that week; his visits were thoroughly commonplace, and each one left behind it the intense mental vision of some look—a word spoken to herself alone—which made a difference in all her day. He had asked for her friendship, but there was something ill-defined about the term. Once when she was putting some violets he had brought her into water, she had let a few of them fall. He had leaned down as if to pick up the flower at once, but he had given her nothing. She

did not know if he had kept it, and the doubt brought a touch of colour to her cheeks, and made the hand which held the flowers tremble. Lexeter noticed it at once. It was unusual for him to remain there through one of Count Lalli's visits. "I do really believe Mr. Lexeter is jealous of poor Cesco," Octave suggested one day with her pretty innocent smile.

The two girls were alone together in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Jealous! Please don't say such things, dear," said Barbara, turning her head suddenly and looking at her.

Octave clasped her hands behind her curly head and looked up at the ceiling and smiled.

"How often has Mr. Lexeter been here this week?"

“Nearly every day. He comes to talk to papa about his books. I like Mr. Lexeter so much.”

“So does——” she moved her head a little to one side and looked at Barbara, “so does Mr. Hardinge. I don’t think myself that he is—dangerous.”

“Don’t be wicked, Octave.”

“Oh no! I should consider it a decided proof of his good taste if he were to fall in love with you. But he is too old for you, Baby. And he hasn’t any money. I don’t believe he could marry if he wanted to. You know he writes for that newspaper.”

“Yes; he told me so.”

“Mr. Hardinge says he is immensely clever. I daresay his friends are all people who do things, and who expects you to

admire them. But you would not mind that."

"Mind it? No! But, my dear child," said Barbara, looking down at her with an amused expression in her clear, grave eyes, "you are talking such extraordinary nonsense. Why, Mr. Lexeter——" She took up a small glass of tea-roses from the mantle-piece and smelt them. "He brought me these to-day; wasn't it kind of him? Here! you may have that pink bud to put in your hair, although you don't deserve it. If you only saw more of him, I am sure you would like him as I do," she said quite calmly.

"Well, I don't know," said Octave doubtfully. "You are such a dear old simpleton. You believe what everybody tells you. And you are always wanting to do things for

other people. Some day you will marry some man simply to oblige him, and he won't be a bit grateful to you for it, Barbara. You will be miserable, and he will feel it to be a criticism upon his own powers of entertainment. It will be very unpleasant."

Barbara laughed. "Poor man! I begin to feel sorry for him already. It will be quite a judgment upon him for being so grasping. And think what a bad housekeeper he will have! Tell me, Octave—speaking seriously—don't you think there is a little, just a little, improvement, in that respect? I saw you looking at the salt-cellars," she said, smiling; "but all that severity was wasted. They are old, very old silver. That black is not meant to come off."

“Margherita certainly waits at table better,” said Octave with a judicial little frown. “I think you have improved—a little. You never, you know, will be what I call a good housekeeper.”

“Ah, but you are so clever at things,” said Barbara, looking at her affectionately.

“I should like to know,” said Octave suddenly, “exactly what you think of Cesco Lalli?”

Barbara started. She put the glass of flowers she was holding carefully down; it struck against the edge of the mantelpiece with a clear ring.

“What do I think of—of Count Lalli?” she repeated.

“Yes, exactly what you think of him? Do you like him? Does he interest you?”

I know that he raves about you," said Octave carelessly ; "but that counts for less. What I want to know is your opinion."

Barbara was silent.

"I suppose that you like him—since you have him to the house."

"I never asked him to come," said Barbara quickly.

"But you like him, nevertheless?"

"Oh—I don't know. I wish you would not tease me so," said Barbara, with a sudden sharp movement of irritation.

The words had hardly passed her lips before she began to regret them. For how was it possible now to offer any calm explanation of her compact of friendship with Lalli which should not sound like an apology?

She stood irresolutely, fingering the fringe of the mantlepiece, for a minute or two, and then she walked over to the window and looked out. There was no curtain, and the wooden shutters were open. She looked out on a dark and starry sky. The wind seemed to have changed; the clouds were high and thin, and drifting to the south. She leaned her forehead against the cool glass. It was too late; it was impossible to explain things now to Octave. She was conscious of feeling a certain sense of relief at this thought. She shrank instinctively from any voice which might give the definiteness—the irrevocable quality, of a spoken word to her inward impulse and apprehension. Already she felt that the charm of unconsciousness was broken, and was there not something

cowardly — something ungenerous towards Lalli in this hesitation about pronouncing herself? Octave would not understand, that was obvious. But if he had been questioned in her place—— She faced about quickly.

“Octave!”

“Ah,” said Miss Damon sleepily, “I was thinking about Lent.”

She sat up and passed her hand once or twice over her hair. Her hands were the poorest thing about her; they were large and not well shaped, and her wrists were too thin.

“Ash Wednesday is on the twentieth this year, Barbara.” She hesitated and looked grave. “I wish I could get you to come to early service.”

“Oh,” said Barbara, with something between a laugh and a sob; “why not? I don’t mind.”

She turned again to her window. She was relieved, but at the same time she felt checked and baffled. The very lightness with which Octave had changed the subject was like a tacit reproach. “I was going to say something rather different—something more important—at least I think so.” She felt the blood rush to her cheeks.

“Nothing could be more important than early service,” began Octave, in her clear imperative treble, and then the dining-room door opened and the gentlemen came in. Mr. Lexeter and Walter Hardinge were both dining there that evening. They were both in particularly good spirits. They stayed

late. About nine o'clock Mr. Clifford Dix was announced. He seemed a little surprised at first, and then chagrined at finding himself only one of a large party.

"I did not know that this was your reception-night, Miss Floyd," he said, as he got up to take a cup of tea from Barbara.

"Will you have cream and sugar? We never have any reception-nights, you know. Only sometimes people happen to call," she said, glancing over at the clock.

He observed that she was looking a little pale; she smiled, but her eyes remained troubled. He saw her look at the clock; was she expecting anyone who had not come? He put down his tea-cup with a slight feeling of annoyance. He turned about on his chair and began to contradict

Lexeter. Presently someone asked Octave to sing. She rose at once, and Hardinge followed her over to the piano.

“Sing something that I know, or at least that I can understand,” he said.

She looked down at her own fingers resting idly on the keys ; she hesitated for an instant, and then she began playing a low monotonous accompaniment. She lifted up her face a little and began to sing. Hardinge crossed his arms on the top of the piano and looked down at her. Her voice was a singularly true and flexible soprano, of no particular strength, but of very great compass. Her higher notes were particularly good—clear, piercingly sweet, and unstrained, like a bird’s. When she sung her face became more serious. She turned

her eyes towards Hardinge between two of the verses, and her glance met his. She coloured suddenly and violently, and bent her head down with a quick movement of her round white throat. He could see the half-opened rosebud stuck carelessly in her hair, and it seemed hardly more flower-like than her face at that moment with this sudden flush of colour passing like a wave under the delicate and transparent skin.

The song she had selected was the old "Stornello Pisano." The monotonous familiar air—monotonous as passion—the wild directness of the words—seemed to awaken a hundred new instincts in Barbara, to quiet a hundred doubts. For years after she could never hear the brave old Italian words without the keenest pang of remembrance.

It came to her like a gallant and devoted appeal, which stirred profoundly the more chivalric issues of her spirit. She rose with quite another expression on her face to take part in the conversation which followed Octave's singing. When Miss Damon had gone into the next room to put on her hat Barbara accompanied her ; she looked at her quite simply as she said :

“ You wanted to know about Count Lalli. Well, I have been thinking about him, and I am sure—that is, I think—I mean I hope we shall see a great deal of him. Do you know, Octave, poor fellow ! he has almost no friends. All his old comrades are gone, either home again with the French troops—you know, he has been intimate with so many Frenchmen—or they have taken ser-

vice with the Italians, and that he will not do. I can understand that. At first I thought it was a mistake on his part, but now—don't you see how fine it is to be living up to all one's own old beliefs and purposes, when everything else has changed and crumbled away about you? I think"—her voice lowered a little, and she put her hand suddenly up to her lips—"I think there is something heroic in that," she said.

"My dear child, the man has places in the country to look after, his *tenuta*; have you never heard him speak of that? The Lalli family are like half the other Romans," said Octave, carelessly, looking in the glass and adjusting her hat, "his grandfather—Cesco's grandfather—the one who was made

a count by the Pope—began it, and since then they have always kept those farms. He has another place, you know, near Bracciano.”

She put her head on one side and smiled, and hummed a few notes of the “Stornello.”

“This has been such a pleasant evening,” she said, showing all her dimples. “So you and Cesco are going to be great friends, Miss Barbara, eh? I thought as much. But oh, Barbara, was not Mr. Dix amusing? I will tell you something your Mr. Lexeter said to him; they were talking about modern novels, and Mr. Lexeter said that in English novels the characters all seem to be walking about in their ulsters, they are so thick, and practical, and material; but in American books they are like so many *écorchés*. They

are all so beautifully dissected and demonstrated, they have not even their natural skin. I don't think Mr. Dix quite liked it."

She finished fastening her cloak, and put up her smooth cheek to be kissed.

"Good-night."

But at the door she turned and looked back.

"Barbara."

"Well, dear?"

"Try and not make Mr. Lexeter too jealous, won't you?"

"Try and not be too absurd, won't you?" said Barbara, smiling and looking at her with her chin resting upon her clasped hands. She sat so for a long while after Octave had left her. The house was perfectly still; the

lamp burned steadily upon the table ; from time to time a wilder gust of wind sent a sudden dash of rain against the window. When she raised her head at last her eyes were more brilliant than usual. She got up from her seat and began walking rather quickly up and down the room ; her hands were clasped together with the arms thrust straight down ; her head was thrown a little back ; the long train of her white dress followed her steps with a quick soft rustle ; the whole expression of her being was one of eagerness and readiness, an ignorant devoted readiness to meet the claims of any future.

It was, I believe, the very next day that she called upon Miss Maclean with Mr. Lexeter. They had met accidentally upon

the Corso, near Miss Maclean's door. The wind had fallen again, the weather had changed, the sky overhead was of an uniform silvery gray, with here and there a darker loosely-floating cloud; the air had suddenly turned warm and soft; half the people they met were wearing flowers, and shallow baskets heaped with dark violets were being offered for sale at every street corner. They had walked along for some little distance together, and then :

“ I am going in here to see Miss Maclean,” Barbara said, stopping. She held out her hand. “ But wait ; don't you want to come with me ? They are such dear old ladies. Come in, and Miss Janet will get her sister to play to you ; and it will be such a pleasure for them to see a new face.”

“Oh, but I never make calls, you know,” said Lexeter, in a protesting voice, and then, and much to Margherita’s dissatisfaction, he followed her slowly, but resignedly, up the many stairs. Margherita objected to Mr. Lexeter. If it had been a tall, straight, gallant-looking young man like Count Lalli, now, or even like that other young *forestiere*, this one’s friend! But a man of at least five-and-thirty, with a decided halt in his walk! She looked at him with the severe personal criticism of a Roman; but, then, if he were rich? Providence had a quite unaccountable way of providing these hard-visaged, dull-eyed foreigners with money.

Miss Maclean and her sister Miss Janet were two of Barbara’s greatest friends. She had often spoken of them to Lexeter; he

was quite prepared for their precise and formal welcome. He saw Barbara take one white-haired old lady after the other by the hand and kiss her soft withered cheek ; the smile which lighted up their placid, high-bred faces pleased him ; he listened with a certain curiosity and interest to their quaint and gentle speech.

The whole character of the little drawing-room accorded well with its inhabitants. They seemed lifted away here from any contact with the actual world ; here, at least, life implied neither haste, nor uncertainty, nor forgetfulness. The calm of a faithful habit was all about them like the air they breathed. Everything had its own place and its own remembrance ; there was not a speck of dust on any of the curious bits of

china, on the faded Indian screens, the small blackened frames of the round, old-fashioned mirrors, the group of faded miniatures hanging in their accustomed circle by Miss Maclean's own tall and straight-backed chair.

"The portrait in the centre is that of our father," the old lady said in her thin gracious old voice, seeing Lexeter's eyes turn in that direction.

It was a small oval miniature representing a young man with a smiling face and melancholy brown eyes, dressed in the costume of the last century. He wore a white rose in the lappel of his high rolling collar.

"Taken at Paris, at the age of twenty, when our father was a page in the service of His Majesty, Charles Edward," said

Miss Janet, rising briskly and coming forward; "and that bonnie lassie on the other side is my sister Elizabeth, painted in Highland costume as she went to her first ball. Dear, dear, to think how I can remember that evening! I was a bit of a bairn in the nursery still, and Elizabeth was ten years older. Dear, dear, how I did envy her going out. And that is sixty years ago."

"But isn't it a lovely portrait, Mr. Lexeter? And I always think that one can see the likeness now," said Barbara, looking from the slim smiling girl in the miniature to the proud-faced old lady with the silvery hair.

"Ah, but you'll not see such beauties now as my sister Elizabeth," said Miss Janet,

briskly, with a triumphant smile on her own dear honest work-a-day face. "I mind me yet of the way the young men crowded about her at the Duchess's ball, at Brussels, the night before Waterloo. Dear, dear, and to think how all those bonny lads went marching away the next morning; and Elizabeth up there on the balcony looking at them, still in her ball-dress and with a red flower in her hair. Dear, dear, and how they did turn their heads to look up at her as they went marching by with their music playing. And there was many a one of them that the last thing he remembered, poor laddie, will have been that last look at my sister Elizabeth."

"Have done, Janet, ye silly woman," Miss Maclean said rebukingly. She folded

her beautiful old hands together complacently, and looked at Lexeter with a faint conscious colour in her soft old cheeks. "Here you are, chattering like a magpie about the beauty of an old woman in a cap, and all the while that feckless lass, Jessie, has never offered our visitors so much as a drop or a crumb. I think shame of your carelessness, sister."

"Dear, dear; to think that I should have forgotten," said Miss Janet penitently, trotting away briskly on her willing old feet.

She returned presently, followed by a squarely-built middle-aged woman, whose honest hard-featured face lighted up with a broad smile at sight of Barbara.

"Eh, but it is a gude sight to see our

young lady here again, Miss Elizabeth. Whiles I thocht you had clean forgotten us," she said.

"Come, come, Jessie; put the tray down, woman, and don't fill Miss Barbara's head with nonsense," said Miss Janet sharply.

She poured out the wine herself into the small old-fashioned glasses. Lexeter detested sweet wine, but he drank it submissively. The room was warm and smelt vaguely of lavender and spices. Miss Janet had a small withered apple stuck all over with cloves in the square embroidered bag which hung by its faded ribbon from the arm of her straight-backed chair. One of the windows looked out on the Corso; it was half filled up with flowering plants in pots.

“Your roses always get on so much better than mine,” Barbara said, looking at them.

The noise of the street was only a confused murmur at this height. The small smouldering fire burned discreetly upon the immaculate hearthstone, without a flame or a sound. The two old ladies sat in their accustomed seats on either side of the fireplace, looking with gentle expectancy at their guests ; every line of their fine old faces expressed a feeling of pleased hospitality and calm. A stray gleam of watery sunlight passing over the little row of faded portraits was like another pale smile of welcome—an invitation to rest in the profound serenity of these blameless lives.

“ Dear Miss Janet, I wonder if you would

show Mr. Lexeter your precious glove?" said Barbara.

It was Miss Elizabeth who kept the keys. Once, ten or fifteen years before, a political refugee had spent a day and a night concealed in their peaceful house. It was Miss Elizabeth who had protected him. "What! would ye turn the man out to be taken by his enemies?" the proud old lady had said when the other women had hesitated, appalled by the danger they were running. "Is that your Highland hospitality? And have you forgotten what was done for Maclean of Mull, in the Forty-five, when he too had to go into his hiding? I think shame for you, Janet," said the old Highland woman.

With her own trembling hand she prepared the fugitive's supper. They kept him for a

day and a night, until he could communicate with his friends ; a poor cowering wretch he was ; a mere shop lad implicated in some foolish conspiracy ; but they waited on him themselves with their own hands ; Miss Janet pale and tearful, but following her sister's lead without the thought of a remonstrance ; and gave him money out of their own scanty store. He had left some compromising papers behind him, treasonable documents, which they hid deep in their linen-chest, under the folds of their fine worn old clothes. The dangerous documents were there still ; they had never disturbed them. Many a night Miss Janet had thought of them, lying timidly awake, hearing the heavy step of a Papal gendarme in every sound of the wind upon the creaking stair. But they had

never thought of burning them—the old Jacobite instinct was too strong for that.

“It is not the first secret the Macleans have held fast,” Miss Elizabeth would say proudly, turning her old white head to look at her father’s miniature upon the wall.

Miss Janet had never forgotten her sister’s conduct on that occasion. The plot was outlawed now ; its object—the very name of the conspirators—forgotten. But they had never troubled themselves about that. “What we keep we hold fast,” had said the brave old lady. The papers still were safely locked away, in company of old letters, old manuscript books, old memoranda, old flowers and locks of hair—a whole host of dusty memories, loves, hopes, defeats.

Miss Maclean took out her keys now.

She unlocked a wooden box ; inside there was a glass cover, and under it, fastened to a piece of crimson velvet, a small embroidered glove.

“ This was Queen Mary’s glove ; she wore it on her flight from Holyrood. She gave it to the chief of the Macleans—for good service rendered,” the silvery-haired, placid lady said proudly enough.

They all looked at it with a curious eagerness. What a reward—and for what gallant service !

“ Have you been living many years in Rome, Miss Maclean ? ” Lexeter asked respectfully.

“ Five-and-twenty years this last time. Our father died here when we were girls. He never left Italy after the death of the

Cardinal of York," said Miss Janet briskly. "We came back in the Forty-five, I always tell my sister," she said, with her sweet old smile.

Before they left, Barbara begged Miss Maclean to play for them. "There is nothing," said Miss Janet, "like the Highland music my sister Elizabeth plays."

"Dear Miss Janet," said Barbara, "I want to show Mr. Lexeter your beautiful view. And indeed it has quite stopped raining. May I open the balcony-window a moment?"

"Surely, my lassie."

They stepped out upon the narrow iron balcony together. It was at the turn of the afternoon. Recent showers had left the wall glistening wet and mottled with rose-

red spots, against which the green of the little stone-plants, growing between the bricks, was fresh and vivid like a jewel. Far down below them was the sunless, well-like court ; a woman was drawing up some water ; they could distinguish the rattle of the chain. They were looking across a world of curious huddled roof-tops, unexpected silhouettes, a confusion of fantastic chimney-pots, and high *loggie*, and the dark tops of the convent cypresses. Beyond this was the river. It had stopped raining ; the sky was almost blue in places. The air blew soft and coolly after the closeness of the fire-heated room. There was a distinct movement among the great floating masses of clouds overhead ; a sudden dazzle of light burst at the horizon, and mounted up,

pillar-like, above the mist-covered plain. A few large warm drops of rain fell ; they glistened on Barbara's cheek and touched Lexeter's bare hands, but neither of them thought of going in. The potent ineffable charm of the spring was upon them. They were both silent. And still the music went on—a wild and plaintive strain. The old Highland woman began bravely enough with the gallant, stirring, cavalier airs, such as her sister loves. How is it now that the old white head is bending lower over the keys, and what memory of her youth is stirring as her fingers wander into the sad wild song of the dying, “Oran an Aoig,” the lament of the battle-field ? To Lexeter this afternoon has been like a revelation of inviolate and soothing calm. This quiet household

of women, living in an atmosphere of old romantic memories, unknown and undisturbed of the world, was like the very sanctuary of peace. He looked out over the crowded life of Rome, and the confused murmur of the city streets died away a meaningless murmur at his feet. The charm of long continuance was upon him ; the absence of expectation ; the unaspiring peace which passeth understanding. His thoughts went back to the old stories he had been hearing, to that line of faded miniatures—so many years of life and all to end here ! His restless, unsatisfied spirit was stricken dumb in presence of this calm, this placid acceptance and forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness ! but what heart forgets ?
what passion wholly dies ? what past is not

the sharpest accent of the present? The music went bravely on through the tranquil twilight. The player's head was white and tremulous, but the ghosts of half a century back were communing with her spirit. When Miss Janet lifted her gentle old eyes from the smouldering embers, it was with a great awe and tenderness that she saw the trace of tears upon her sister's cheek.

The sun was setting now behind St. Peter's, and the clouds which lay in horizontal folds above the hills were tinged with a dull coppery red. The river ran pale beneath its heavy bridges; the pines of the Pamphili Gardens seemed a darker procession than ever against the colourless sky.

"I must go," said Barbara, moving

her arms from the balustrade upon which she had been leaning.

As they were shaking hands at the street-door, Lexeter stopped her for a moment. He wanted to consult about the fittest day to choose for going to Ostia on horseback as they had already planned. It flashed across her mind once or twice to ask him if he intended to invite Count Lalli. But they parted without mentioning his name. She had assured him that she would be his friend, and in all good faith she had believed it; but there was something about Lalli which repulsed while it excited her imagination. Abstractly considered, she was very sorry for him; he preoccupied her. She quite unconsciously endowed him with a depth and tenacity of emotion which

was her own, not his. She thought of him as suffering. "At least one can be silent," he had told her on that first night of their meeting; and the phrase had opened before her a world in which she had felt fervently alive—eager for loving service. She had been moved with a sense of surprise—a delicious thrill of triumph—by the consciousness of his admiration and liking; and yet, for all that, she was ever dimly aware that should any insurmountable circumstance arise now—without delay—to separate them, her feeling of regret would not be unmingled with a sense of relief. The realisation of this feeling was like a lowering brand of ingratitude. She would allow herself no opportunity of influencing Lexeter. She knew that if he invited the

count it would be entirely from an idea of giving her pleasure ; and as she walked slowly homeward her mind was filled with a certain scorn of her own selfish weakness.

When Lope de Vegas and his men first exchanged their glass beads for the gold-dust of the Indians, it is quite possible there may have been some among the natives afflicted with this same generous shame at the disproportion of their return for those glittering gifts.

END OF VOL. I.



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